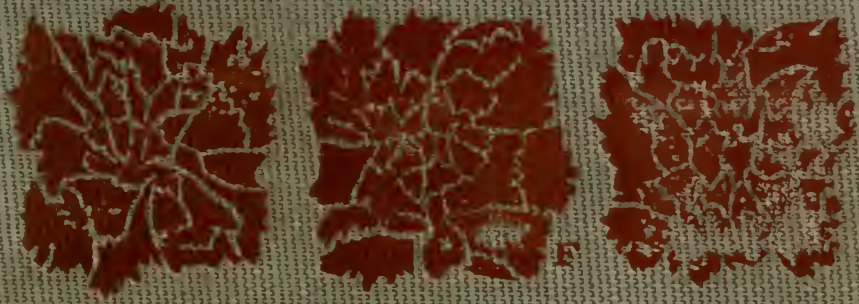


ART THOU THE MAN?

GUY · BERTON



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ART THOU THE MAN ?



"THEY TURNED AND STUMBLED IN A PANIC DOWN THE STAIRS."

Art Thou the Man?

By

Guy Berton

Illustrations By

Charles R. Macauley

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CHAPTER I

Cry "Murder!" in the market place, and each
Will turn upon his neighbour anxious eyes
That ask—"Art thou the man?"

—Rudyard Kipling.

A whisper went through the Quarter; at first formless, undefinable, and thin. It penetrated the walls of the gambling-houses, siftingly, like dry cold. The men at play lifted their heads—listened; silently pushed their stacks of chips toward the dealers, shoved back their chairs; without a word went out into the street. It crept between the swinging-doors of the saloons like an ugly presence. Men with glass on lips paused, waited, put down their drink untasted—quickly left these places. It permeated the dance-houses; women shivered and paled without knowing why; checked the ravings of the pianos; looked at one another with vague awe, then stealthily barred the windows and doors. It stole up and down the street; loungers halted suddenly on the sidewalk; policemen thrust their inadequate clubs into their belts, felt the handles of their revolvers; and over every person in the Quarter, that night,

there came a sudden dread, a feeling of suspicion, and the most uncouth, hardened soul was disturbed incomprehensibly.

In the office of the Denver *Record*, the telephone bell rang sharply, peremptorily. Answered by Armstrong, the city editor, a voice shouted excitedly:

"Another woman strangled."

"Who? Where?"

"Gisquette Gringoire—French Quarter!"

"Where are you—at their club?"

"Yes."

"All right, Murphy 'll join you," Armstrong replied. Hanging up the receiver, he whirled around and sung out to a man, already getting into his overcoat:

"Hurry down to the French Club, Murphy! Simmonds says the strangler is at work again!" The reporter grabbed his hat and vanished through the door.

The city editor resumed his work, and barring a few desultory exclamations, the local room—"as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be," as the church reporter once said in a burst of irreverent levity—returned calmly to its usual routine; for even on these tempestuous nights when murders, suicides, scandals, wrecks, and fires seem by their number and coin-

cidence to announce a coming cataclysm, its serenity is seldom clouded.

Here, adventitious shades of blotting-paper concentrate the lights of many electric lamps on the tables where the reporters, in various phases of dishabille, write in every known degree of feverishness. From one wall, a clock with a jaundiced face—at least twenty years old—stares down with the insolent admonition that time is short; upon a second wall, a brazen fire-alarm gong is fairly tingling with expectancy; opposite the clock, the telephone, militant and instantaneous, holds infinite possibilities of sensation. Elsewhere lithographs in profusion—portraits of Presidents, pugilists, actresses, parades, and local celebrities.

In the left-hand corner of the room stands the desk of the city editor. It is of black walnut, old-fashioned, battered and begrimed, yet staunch and brave after its many years of service. City editors have come and gone; but it has endured "the insolence of office and the spurns" and bears its scars like a soldier. The old desk, fragrant with memories, is a catacomb of genius, mummied in manuscript and the home of a thriving family of cockroaches; in its drawers and pigeon-holes there is a haggis of nondescript and transient articles that, if you

but knew their stories, would introduce you to a vocation strange and unconventional. Here also, treasured most of all, are the old assignment books — fourteen of them, holding flavours of romance like chronicles of the Round Table or relics of bygone minstrelsy.

For fourteen years—so laggard is promotion—Armstrong, by day and by night, has assigned the brisk young men of his staff to their respective duties of news-gathering; and you might trace their names, as they have come and gone, upon the pages of these books. Two you will find there continuously: Simmonds and Murphy, patriarchs who have earned their patent of nobility in the fourth estate. They can tell you many a merry tale,—many a sad one,—and prove it by these records.

A few nights after the murder of Gisquette Gringoire, the patriarch Murphy strode into the local room, slamming the door behind him. His hat and coat were dripping wet. Without stopping to remove them, he at once confronted the city editor. There was on Murphy's face an expression of defiance mingled with chagrin, so unmistakable and so unnatural to that buoyant soul, that every other reporter in

the room paused in his work to look at him. The city editor raised his head.

"Well?" he asked, briefly.

"Well," answered Murphy, dejectedly, "I'm dead tired—beaten—up a stump. If you've got anybody here who thinks he'd make a brilliant detective, I wish you'd turn him loose on this story, that's all."

Armstrong dropped his blue pencil, looked calmly at the intrepid chronicler of the world's miseries, and inquired:

"What's the matter, Murphy? You haven't fallen down on the strangling story, have you?"

In the city editor's tone there was just the suggestion of solicitude and appeal to pride required to make the reporter's discomfiture complete. Murphy flushed, looked at the wall in confusion, and then leaned upon the desk unmindful of the little stream of water that trickled from his sleeve across a pile of manuscript. His voice dropped as he related the circumstances of his failure; and only an occasional expletive, or a morsel of slang, tossed out of the current of his hurrying narrative, reached the straining ears of the other men. All were curious to learn how this star reporter, hitherto so confident and sure, had failed on the biggest story they had ever known.

"Day and night," said Murphy, with emphasis, "since that last girl was strangled, I have sleuthed with the detectives—made friends with every Frenchman I could induce to take a drink—hung around the place where the 'Compagnie' make its headquarters, till to-night they almost threw me out. Why? Simply because I couldn't convince them that I was not digging up evidence—trying to drive them all out of the country."

Murphy was exasperated, humiliated. The more he thought of it all, the angrier he became.

"And what have I found out?" he exclaimed, furiously. "Just this: Diane Therdier was strangled *about* midnight, August 30. Margaret Valois, *about* midnight, September 30. Gisquette Gringoire, *about* midnight, October 30. *That's* about all I know and about all anybody knows."

"What about Richard Therdier?" asked Armstrong. "The police think——"

"Idiots!" interrupted Murphy. "They haven't any evidence against him. They locked him up because Diane Therdier was his wife, and the first of the three women strangled. They took him in on general principles. They're great on principles! They can't convict Ther-

dier! Granting that he did strangle his wife, in a scrap, what the devil did he kill the other two for? They were not robbed. A man isn't going around killing women without some motive, is he?"

The city editor and Murphy talked long and earnestly. Finally, Murphy straightened up, and said, resignedly:

"Can't help it, Mr. Armstrong. I've done my best, and haven't found the slightest clue."

Armstrong turned again to his work.

Murphy, with an air of almost comical abandon, tossed his overcoat upon a chair, threw himself desperately into another, put his feet on a desk, lighted a long cigar, and began an intent and quizzical study of the dirty ceiling. Silence fell upon the room, intensified by the fluttering of loose sheets of paper and an occasional suppressed ejaculation. Outside, the rain tapped a dreary monotone on roofs and pavements; and at short intervals, a street-car gong interjected a muffled clang. Suddenly Murphy glanced almost affectionately at a young man at work across the room. Instantly the expression on his face changed. At least, he seemed to have solved a vexatious problem. He lighted a fresh cigar, and addressed Armstrong, in a low voice.

"I say, Mr. Armstrong——"

"Yes," replied the editor, without looking up from his papers.

"Would you mind a suggestion from me? A favour, if you will?"

Armstrong was surprised. The request was unusual. He glanced inquisitively at the speaker.

"Out with it; but you know you'll have to write something, Murphy."

"Why not give the youngster a show?" Murphy almost whispered, nodding significantly. "A little new blood might turn the trick—I'll steer him."

Armstrong reflected a moment. He was not ignorant of the semi-paternal interest that the Patriarch had for the newcomer.

"All right, I'll give him a try," he said, not unkindly, and then went on somewhat brusquely, "Go ahead anyhow—roast the police for their incapacity—intimate that more hustling and less theorising would be a good thing for the welfare of this community." Armstrong smiled grimly upon delivering this last instruction, then looked across the room. "Mr. Drake, come here, please."

A young man who had been writing diligently, with barely a recognition of the scene that had attracted the curious attention of the

other reporters, arose and approached the city editor's desk. He was about twenty-seven years old, of medium height and muscular build, with broad shoulders and a suggestion of athletic training in his movements.

"Are you about up, Mr. Drake?" asked Armstrong.

"All but one short item," he replied.

"Hurry with it, then. I want you to take the strangler story. I'll talk it over with you presently."

The last sheets of copy for the early mail edition had just gone up to the composing-room when Armstrong stopped before the young man's desk, and said:

"Here's an opportunity for good work, Drake. This mystery seems impenetrable. There is something uncanny—an inexpressible horror about it. Why, even the officers, when they entered the bedchamber of the third victim, that night, shuddered and stood silent as if oppressed by the shadow of a terror. Besides, the victims were young, pretty, and there was no apparent motive for the crimes."

"What's your theory?" inquired Drake, eagerly.

"I'm undecided. At times, I think the murderer is a second Whitechapel fiend; then again,

I'm almost convinced that Therdier is guilty. The police think that he killed the others to divert suspicion from himself. You will recall that, although arrested for the murder of his wife, he was out on bail when the other crimes were committed."

"Yes, I remember—and at intervals of a month almost to the very hour."

Armstrong pursued his train of thought. "He must have been a man of amazing physical strength. In none of the cases was there the least evidence of a struggle; and a single scream would probably have betrayed him."

"Evidence!" exclaimed Drake. "Is there any such against Therdier?"

"None whatever. He says he was at the French Club playing cards, on the night Diane Therdier, his wife, was killed. He returned to his house at midnight, but did not go to her room. About ten o'clock the next morning, he arose and went to market. In the meantime, a servant had discovered the woman—dead. The officers came and arrested him."

"Therdier, it seems to me," declared Drake, "is just the sort of a man who would murder his wife."

"Precisely, and yet all he would admit was that, after he had gone to sleep, he was half



"THE OFFICERS SHUDDERED AND STOOD SILENT."

awakened by a noise, very like a scream; but in his semi-conscious state, he thought it was a dream and fell asleep again. Then there is a theory," continued Armstrong, "that is extremely plausible and bad for Therdier. His brother Jacques, the owner of the French Club, is the head of the 'Compagnie.' Suppose these women had learned some of their secrets, and the society determined to put them out of the way?"

"It's going to be difficult to get anything out of the 'Compagnie,'" asserted Drake.

"Yes, they are extremely suspicious, and will protect Therdier, not only with money, but with all the resources of a versatile race. There is one peculiar thing about Therdier," said Armstrong, in conclusion. "It has no direct bearing on the case, but it impressed me. Although French-born, his early life was passed in Constantinople and other parts of the Orient where little value is placed on human life—particularly women." Returning to his desk, he added: "Therdier's lawyer, Henry Woolford, is an extraordinary man—a keen student of criminology. First, I think I'd go to see him."

A few minutes later Drake and Murphy were seated at a table in their favourite corner at Dupree's. After they had ordered supper,

the Patriarch unbosomed himself. Murphy's chief characteristics were red hair, a red waistcoat, and a vocabulary that might with figurative accuracy also be called red. This vocabulary was made up, for the most part, of several varieties of slang, each excelling the others, it seemed, in picturesque indifference to the rules of speech. How Murphy managed to write English fit to be printed was a subject of continual speculation among the other members of the staff. The city editor and his assistant might have enlightened them; but the most either had ever said on this point was a remark Armstrong made one night, in the stress of hurry and impatience, to the effect that "Murphy's contempt for verbs was positively sublime." Whatever his failings were in this respect, Murphy was chivalrous in his brazen way, generous, and true.

"I don't envy you your job, old man," said Murphy, with a fetching frankness, by way of beginning the conversation.

"Don't you?" responded Drake, invitingly.

"No, I'm damned if I do!" reiterated Murphy, still more frankly. Then he proceeded with great wealth of detail and with many copious extracts from his own volume of experience to explain why he had failed to run down the

quarry, and why he was content to let Drake win all the glory there might be in the undertaking.

As Drake walked homeward, his brain was busy with all the disconnected details of the case, toiling to classify them. Only a few fitful drops of rain fell now; wet stars began to leak tricklings of light through the wrack of flying clouds; thin streamings of vapour rose from warm spots on the pavement. Thinking and walking rapidly, his blood flowed hot; he removed his raincoat and checked his athletic stride.

It was late when he reached home. His mother was awake, as she always was when he came in. Sitting on the edge of her bed, he related to her the occurrences of the night.

"I'd rather you were not obliged to work on such stories, Allan," she said, with gentle deprecation; "but some one must, I suppose."

"Mother, dear," he said, kissing her good-night, "you want me to succeed—well, here's my chance."

CHAPTER II

"Inscrutable by nature or device,
While all men doubted whether he might be
Profoundly frigid like the bitter sea,
Or a volcano lapped in Arctic ice."

HENRY WOOLFORD, the famous criminal lawyer, retained by Jacques Therdier to defend his brother Richard, lived in a large house in Vine Street. It was set far back in a wide lawn, and in summer was half concealed by superb maple trees whose limbs were now like latticework, paintless and in decay.

The following afternoon, Drake, having vainly attempted to gain an audience of the lawyer at his office, proceeded to obtain it at his home. A woman past the middle age, grey-haired, erect, one of the vanishing type of servants, came to the door. She seemed, in some impressibly subtle way, to be a proper part of the establishment, as she led him into the darkened reception hall.

A minute later when he was ushered into the library, he found two persons there. One, a man whom he knew at once to be the lawyer; the other was a girl. They had been seated at a massive

table which was covered with books and papers. The light from the table-lamp fell bright upon them; a green shade kept the rest of the room in shadows, save for the fitful crimson glow that came from the open fireplace. Drake was aware of certain dim, painted faces staring solemnly out of the wall; of tall, black cases filled with books; of grim armour in one dark recess; of a heavy sword suspended above the mantelpiece; of old-fashioned chairs and a damask couch. It was only an impression, to be sure, but somehow, trained to quick perception, he felt at once an undefinable sensation come upon him—not readily shaken off. He was familiar with the true culture that effaces as well as with the new wealth that displays itself. Here was something different—occultation and a meaning too fine for instant understanding.

Henry Woolford was thirty-eight years old, dignified, cold, and courteous in his greeting. He was, in physique, a man such as the stupidest observer would turn to look upon a second time. It was not merely that he was comely, that he was strong; but rather that in his comeliness and strength there was some rare quality of sufficiency—of separateness—of isolation. He was six feet in height, compactly built, virile, intense, with nerves of steel—the kind of steel they

make mainsprings of as well as rifle barrels and armour plate. Above a broad white forehead, his hair, light in colour and fine of grain, was thinning. His face, pale, but not unhealthy in its hue, invited scrutiny; his lips delicate, mobile, downward-curving; nose long and sensitive; jaws massive in the sweep from ears to chin; eyes grey-blue, cold, unsympathetic, holding in their depths a peculiar potency that sometimes repelled, as often fascinated.

Woolford's dress was of the best material and latest cut. It had the appearance of having been put on carelessly, as if he had purchased his clothes with close attention to detail, and had forthwith ceased to think of them. In manner, he was quick and nervous, but withal easy and reserved—a kind of inexplicable contradiction. It was not until he spoke, however, that he revealed the chief secret of his influence over men. He had a marvellous voice—sweet, musical, resonant; rich in coaxing tones and in seducing melodies. It was the voice of an orator, flexible, under absolute control; a voice to move audiences to passion and juries to unreason; the voice of an angel, a tempter, an accusing spirit, as the mood might be. With a voice like that, and a mind to give it matter, a man may speak of cube roots and logarithms as

common men of stars and bramble dew; may easily contrive of sticks and stones a glistering pageant of imagination.

What is it—this magic of the human voice? The eyes have been called, with poetic aptness, the windows of the soul; but what exaggerations of the fancy, and what refinement of mere words, can fitly designate the deep significance of full-throated speech! Detailed pedigrees tell much; faces in keen analysis may reveal a diagram of family history; manners give continual testimony to good breeding, or quick exposure of the want of it; but the voice, truer than all these, has the cunning gift to place its owner, indubitably and beyond appeal, in his predestined place. All the voices of his ancestry—sweet or bitter, dissonant or symphonious; prayers and curses; costermongering yells, or drawing-room cadenzas; sadness and gaiety, misery and joy; culture and ignorance; taint of darkness or touch of light—all the voices of his ancestry are composite in the throat of every man that parts his lips to speak. Time may obliterate the brand of Cain, but only eternity can sweeten the vowels of the murderer; and though "one sad losel may spoil a name for aye," a life of ignoble deeds can little more than harden the timber of a noble nature's accent.

Henry Woolford's voice, could it have been analysed, as the sun's rays are broken in the spectroscope, would have revealed his story of heredity. The two lines of his ancestry, parallel some two hundred years and then converged in him, were distinctly intellectual. Henry's father in '61 had left a lucrative law practice to lead a regiment of Union volunteers, and, a few years later, had died of wounds received in battle. His grandfather was a governor of Vermont. His great grandfather was a leader in Congress—a fiery Whig in the days when argument and oratory were the familiar weapons of political antagonism. His mother was a woman of the South. Generation after generation, the men of her family had held high office on the bench—all successful in that leisurely Southern way that adds to sterling character so fine a flavour of distinction. Thus from both lines Henry had inherited legal talents, acumen, and psychological powers, concentrated, purified to the very essence of mentality. It was a noteworthy fact that despite the versatility and the capacity of the Woolford mind, no member of the family had distinguished himself, or even sought distinction in any business or profession other than the law—save only the battlefields of politics and war. Moreover, no collateral

branch of the Woolfords had endured for long, or won remembered recognition. The man and his sister were "all the daughters of their father's house and all the brothers, too."

Henry Woolford had become the foremost criminal lawyer of Colorado—a specialist. From the beginning of his career he had centred all the faculties of his mind upon one branch of his profession; he had steadily narrowed and deepened his researches; and had gradually restricted his practice to certain exceptional phases of criminal defence. In the conduct of a case he displayed a genius for details, for seizing at once upon the vital point and discarding the trivial; for discerning every bearing of a question and weighing it judicially; for balancing evidence against evidence with the skill of a prestidigitator; for demolishing a theory with a word and establishing a new one with another; for dealing with intricate motives and complex emotions. To him the human heart and the immortal soul of man were, it seemed, but maps and diagrams laid before him in red-limned nakedness. Heredity, environment, the accidents of formative influences were no longer mysteries to him, but were the very implements of his craft. It was not strange, then, that men feared him; that the criminal classes, while

they sought him, quailed before him; that even his own clients, whose lives he saved, trembled in his presence, cowed beneath the searching of his eyes, and felt the probing of his silver tongue in their very hearts to be a punishment little less insufferable than the condemning sentence of a judge. Among his fellows of the bar, Woolford was not popular. He was too unsociable to be liked. He was aloof, distant, isolated; a glacial mountain towering in chill loftiness above the mere rotundities of his surroundings.

Henry and his sister lived quietly, almost in seclusion. They were fond of each other, and cared more for each other's company than for the pleasures of society. He took his sister into his confidence; discussed with her the deep problems of human frailty that were his study and his recreation; and with her help prepared his cases for trial. They were deep in the intricacies of the strangling case, when Drake was ushered into the library, that chill November evening.

"From the *Record?*" said Woolford. "This is my sister, Mr. Drake."

In the faint warm glow of the firelight the reporter saw a girl of perhaps twenty years, in a flowing house-gown of white, with a wealth

of hair of the colour of burnished bronze, with half-lights flashing from their curves and coils; he saw that her cheeks glowed; that her eyes were dark, large, shining, frankly meeting his own swift look.

The girl started to move away from the table.

"You needn't go, Marcia," said the lawyer. "That is—you want to talk about the stranglings, perhaps?"

"Yes," Drake answered.

"Then stay, please, Marcia. My sister," turning again toward Drake, "assists me in all my cases."

CHAPTER III

As the strong man exults in his physical ability, delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which disentangles.

—Edgar Allan Poe.

Woolford plunged at once into the interview.

"I am glad you came," he said, "because I want the *Record* to publish the facts in these strangling cases. There is a mystery in them that has led the newspapers to print all sorts of wild, impossible, and idiotic theories in their efforts to outdo one another, and to furnish sensational reading for the public."

"The city editor tells me you have refused to be interviewed," answered Drake, a little nettled by the lawyer's words.

"That's true. I don't try my cases in the newspapers. Nevertheless, in this instance I have a mind to set you right, for the reason that these columns of idle conjecture and mischievous confusion keep the community stirred up, and do a great injustice to my client, Therdier."

"The *Record* is eager to publish everything

you will say," said Drake. "It has already printed fully the police side of the case."

"That is the very thing I most complain of," responded Woolford. "The police! What do they know of the science of crime! But the newspapers I had thought more intelligent and discriminating." He paused as if preparing his thoughts for utterance, paying little attention to the man before him, who concealed with difficulty his disagreeable impression; then, with a sweeping gesture, he pointed to an oaken cabinet standing in a recess near the fireplace.

"There," said he, "is a cabinet, divided into twelve compartments for as many classes of documents. These papers here, on the table, are the answer in a case being prepared for trial; and from that fact I know that they belong in a certain one of those compartments. That is simple enough, is it not?"

"Certainly," answered Drake, impressed not so much by the lawyer's words as by his manner, which was peculiarly positive and significant.

"Well, you can classify all crimes as easily. First strip them of the impossible, then examine the known facts; and you know the kind of criminal that did the work in every case."

"In every case? Can you analyse these strangling cases in that way?" asked Drake.

"It is possible to analyse *every* crime in that way. But I am not through with the illustration. My office boy can place properly nine of these twelve classes of papers, because to do it requires only the ability to read. The remaining three I must study over, else I may put them in the wrong compartments. So we may separate crimes into two general classes—the *ordinary* and the *extraordinary*. Nine out of twelve crimes are ordinary. Leave them to the police, and the probability is that the dullest patrolmen will stumble upon the criminal; for the luckless culprits unconsciously will be doing their utmost to assist in their own capture."

"And the other three?" said Drake.

"They are beyond the powers of the police. They are the extraordinary. It is to this class that these cases belong. Have you ever seen Therdier?"

"Yes, I have talked with him."

"What sort of a man did you take him to be?"

"An ordinary Frenchman, unscrupulous—cruel."

"You are right. He is an ordinary Frenchman, and probably is capable of an ordinary crime; but that *he* could be the strangler is impossible. Look at these crimes! The motive is

concealed; the audacity of the criminal amazes you; the apparent contempt for human life appals you; and, as you go deeper into the mystery, facts are revealed that confound you. These murders were committed at an hour when the French Quarter was thronged with people. The women lay not ten feet from a street crowded with passers-by. One outcry—one miscalculation on his part, even in the smallest detail of his work, would have betrayed him. It was as if an invisible hand had smitten the very heart of the Quarter, and taken a life. The assassin left but one clue; and that marked the crime as extraordinary, proved that Therdier was innocent, and told even more plainly than a photograph could, the character of the strangler. This clue the police passed by unnoticed."

The lawyer spoke with calmness and deliberation. His words, manner, and voice fascinated Drake, at the same time mystified him. As often as he had tried to take his eyes off Woolford's face, to look at the lawyer's sister, his gaze had been drawn back by the strange magnetism in the man.

"In the meantime," Woolford continued, "the police are preparing a surprise for us. In an ordinary case, it would not be bad; but in this—why, I'll show you how much I think of

it by revealing the whole secret to you. What do you think of an eye-witness—actually, an eye-witness? Ha!"

Woolford laughed.

"The eye-witness is a negro boy, twenty years old, ignorant, simple-minded. He will say he passed the Therdier window at ten o'clock the night of the murder; he heard voices and the sound of a struggle; he looked in, and saw Therdier, with one hand clasped around the woman's throat, dragging her toward the door leading into the second room. He will say that for a whole month he was too frightened to tell anything about what he had seen; that finally he confided to his mother; that she told other negro women; that she and they at last prevailed upon him to go to the police with his story. Well, the boy is a liar! The negro is naturally superstitious. His mind is open to suggestions. He sups full with horrors and rather likes the feast. Under the influence of terror, such as spread over the neighbourhood of Therdier's place—terror that grew with the repetitions of the fiendish deeds—the negro brain was tortured by illusions and hallucinations which, with long and careful nursing, have grown to the dignity of facts. The boy did not see Therdier kill the woman—could not have

seen him kill her, because Therdier is not the strangler! Every particle of testimony that will be introduced against Therdier will help to acquit him. The prosecution will assume that this is an ordinary murder. The common, paltry motive—the sordid quarrel—the coarse, common character of the man whom they accuse—why, all these things are essential elements of the *ordinary* crime of murder."

A faint smile passed over Woolford's lips, and he shot a significant glance at Marcia, who sat silent on the other side of the table. Then he went on:

"I'll give you a peep into the case of the defence. Do you know that after each of these three women was strangled, a bunch of red carnations was found lying by the side of her body? You had not heard of that, had you? Ask the detectives. Perhaps they will recall the circumstance; and if they do, they'll say, 'Yes, there were some flowers there, but have you heard of our latest discovery in Therdier's record?' And they'll think no more about the carnations. Why, right there is the material for Therdier's acquittal—those three bunches of red carnations, exactly alike, peculiarly tied with similar strings.

"Would Therdier lay red carnations at the

side of his victims? He never bought a red carnation in his life. Furthermore, I challenge you to go to-night and find me a single red carnation in the whole French colony. Why, red poppies, thrice distilled, couldn't put a man to sleep quicker than those flowers will smother all the theories of the prosecution in this case. No, sir," he continued, as he settled himself back in his chair; "it will be plain that an extraordinary criminal, from a strange and possibly insane motive, deliberately planned these crimes. We'll show how an exceptional person, for an extraordinary reason, killed these women, and left them lying cold in death with blue marks on their white throats, their tongues swollen and protruding, a fading look of horror on their fixed faces—and red carnations, fresh, peculiarly tied, carefully placed by their sides. That's my case. You wonder, perhaps, that I speak so frankly. Why, no court will convict Therdier. As for the police? Bah! They do not attain to the importance even of a good joke."

CHAPTER IV

> Dark-veiled Cotytto, to whom the secret flame
> Of midnight torches burns; mysterious dame,
> That ne'er art called, but when the dragon womb
> Of Stygian darkness spets her thickest gloom,
> And makes one blot of all the air.
>
> —Milton's *Comus*.

If you will leave behind you the gathered, garish lights of Sixteenth Street, and over your left shoulder keep the owl-like face of the Union Depot clock; if you will walk far enough, beyond the last bright show-window, beyond the pawnshops, beyond Isaac's second-hand store, and beyond the Mansion Stables, you shall come at length to the shadow-line where respectability, long hesitating, halts; where commerce takes the taint of infamy; where leering vice unveils, and reaches out a leprous hand to virtue gone astray.

Here is The Place of Banished Things. Here you shall find, if you have the courage to look, banished weakness, banished sin, and banished ugliness; banished sights and sounds and odours; banished old pianos that lament in tinny tones their fall from pleasant places; ban-

ished violins that pule on in mended misery; banished songs that lost their freshness long ago; banished oak and tinsel; banished histories, and banished memories; banished men and women, all quite cast away. Banished things of every kind have gathered here with some strange instinct of segregation, like that which makes a gruesome colony of cripples and like that which lays the boundaries of the fastidious Hill. The very atmosphere, having yielded up its oxygen and become satiate with refuse and miasma, might seem to have been banished to this place for ever, so foul and alien is it, so different from the air this side the shadow-line.

Here are no half-tones, no nuances of sound and colour. When the bold lights go out, they go out in darkness that plausibly has weight and measure; and when the strident noises cease, they yield to a tingling silentness. Not a minor chord is heard. The voice of the place is high and shrill. Not a touch of gentle colour can be seen. All is black and red and white;—black for the background of the noisome street; red on the lamps and the doorways; white in splashes here and there—the ghosts of women.

Down this thoroughfare and back a motley rabble jolts and staggers, for the sidewalks are

rough and treacherous, and the spirit of unsteadiness is in the very air. The gutter is filled with filth; the street is unpaved, neglected, strewn with trash. At intervals the wheels of a night-hawk cab rattle over tin cans, and sink deep into heaps of rubbish. Doors slam viciously, and drunken men stumble out into the night with their fumbling hands upon their pockets. Through the scene runs the whole gamut of vice, from Bacchanalian levity to soulless, calculating sin. The sober imagination, infected with the exhalations of the gutter and fed upon the heavy horrors of chiaroscuro, might sanely people the picture with monsters and with monsters' progeny. Here a shutter hisses, as if it contained a Medusa's head; yonder the faces of a hydra smile out of the contorted night; everywhere chimeras dire start capering from the shadows. It is all like "a phantasma and a hideous dream."

Around this place of banished things, the electric spirits of exposure have thrown a noose of light, as if to hold the pestilential blot in its allotted place. It is left in central gloom, like the black spot beneath an arc-lamp, while a radiant circle beats upon the sky. Surely the foul fiend's votaries, like some red-robed, fallen Richelieu, know how to draw a magic

ring inside which their persons are immune and their power is supreme. Civic virtue, impersonated by an oblivious policeman, swings its idle club, and muses on the inherent wickedness of man; a little Baptist mission around the corner chants faint hymns, and closes early; and a block away the street-cars convoy the smug and respectable citizens toward their homes. And though faces disappear, and pianos in time go to the junk-pile, and violins get broken in the middle of a tune, still will new faces and new instruments take their places; for decrees of banishment are issued every day in the convenient way society has of eliminating the weak and the ugly and the old.

Into this place came Drake and Murphy, according to agreement. It was nearly midnight when they approached the French Quarter.

"Denver's slums don't cover a lot of territory," said Murphy, "but just tell me where—outside of Whitechapel—they've ever had such murders as our triple strangling! Now that you are here, I suppose you'll want to meet some of these people, won't you?"

"Yes," answered Drake, "I want to follow up the tips Woolford gave me—the carnations and the story of the negro boy."

"I hardly think the latter is on my list of acquaintances," returned Murphy, smilingly, "but I'll introduce you to some of Therdier's friends."

The houses they were passing, as they walked down the street, were of two classes in appearance. They may be assorted, in a general way, as large and small, pretentious and shabby, all strung together without uniformity of design. Presently, Murphy stopped in front of a building that, both in its architecture and in its pretension to exclusiveness, completely dwarfed, with its magnificence, the squat houses on either side. It was built of cut stone with profuse ornamentation, and contrasted boldly with the houses around it, all built of red brick, long since begun to crumble. The windows of this edifice were closed and heavily curtained. The plate glass of the oaken door was draped on the inside with crimson silk, which let a red flood of light into the street. This was the French Club.

"Here we are!" announced Murphy, cheerfully, and then, with the easy certainty of familiarity, pulled the bell.

The door was quickly opened. A negro servant in livery bowed them in. A brilliantly lighted hallway extended through the house,

and about midway of it a broad staircase led to the floor above. The hall and stairs were carpeted in a deep rich red, and the walls were frescoed in gaudy variations of the same bright hue. Everywhere were incandescent lamps; the place was all afire with colour. Mirrors multiplied the figures of many men talking in little groups. Interlacing all the noises was the incessant clicking of the chips and the monotonous call of a croupier.

Drake followed Murphy to where the most insistent sounds came from. A long room was filled with gaming apparatus; near the door was a roulette wheel around which half a dozen men were playing. The man in charge nodded pleasantly to Murphy. After watching the ball roll a dozen times or more, Murphy crossed to where the faro layout and poker tables were surrounded by players. The room contained perhaps two score of men, all equalised by the gambling mania and sufficient money to gratify it. Some of them, polished, pale-faced, were in evening dress; others wore the incoherent and somewhat egregious garb that proclaimed them to be mine-owners, down from the mountains for recreation. One or two more, in coarser clothing, were evidently prospectors who had recently sold their mining-claims—

eagerly ridding themselves of their too sudden wealth. A few typical gamblers rounded out the assemblage. The people playing were of varied nationality, American for the most part. Those in charge of the games were all Frenchmen, watching with keen eyes and speaking with quiet courtesy, without noise or agitation. Such slight noise as there was came from the players and from the other persons scattered through the house. Men were constantly coming and going; servants busied themselves here and there for the comfort of the guests. Above all, the clicking of the chips—the monotonous calling of the roulette man—"Two black!" "Thirty-six red!" "Double O!" as the ball rolled.

After wandering idly about, greeting a few acquaintances, Murphy wrote something on a card and handed it to a servant. Presently the man returned and, bidding them to follow him, passed through a side door leading to a separate part of the building, mounted a flight of stairs, touched an electric bell, and left them.

"What on earth are you up to now, Murphy?" inquired Drake, as obediently he followed his friend.

"Introduce you to the most fascinating

woman in Denver," whispered Murphy. "Just you wait!"

"But look here! Suppose I don't want to?"

"Remember the old saying, my boy," exclaimed Murphy, "'*Cherchez la femme!*' She can help you if any one can—and if ever a *femme* belies the reputation of her sex and can keep her mouth shut, she's the lady. Hush! some one is coming!"

CHAPTER V

In the draperies' purple gloom,
In the gilded chamber she stands.
I catch a glimpse of her bosom's bloom,
And the white of her jewelled hands.
—Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

Old nature, commonly so true to her own stern laws, loathing prodigies and hating paradoxes, now and then delights in a riotous thaumaturgy. She plants the edelweiss in cold crannies of Alpine rocks; she hangs her rarest orchids amid the poisons and the fumes of antipodean jungles; and she administers a rebuke to pride when she rears a lily out of excrement and glorifies a dunghill with a violet crown.

Nature seemed to sanction vice and to suffer violation when she allowed Elise Du Vivier to bloom in the noxious atmosphere of the Therdier establishment. And, as if in defiance of all reason, and in scorn of all tradition, she had grown into full and sensuous beauty. How well this exotic flower would have endured the test of more orderly conditions—of contrast with normal womanhood—need never be conjectured.

Elise was seldom seen outside her own sumptuous surroundings. From somewhere she had inherited a spirit and, more than that, an art which had been no more subdued than her good looks had been by the strange conditions of her life. All the graces of coquetry and plenary powers of fascination were her especial heritage from the gods.

Elise was neither large nor small, as standards go, but was of that medium height which, as the mood may urge, permits of queenly dignity or kitten playfulness. She was exquisitely moulded; every movement of her lithe body was the embodiment of languid grace; every pore of her soft, white skin breathed warm, voluptuous life. Her face was a perfect oval; her lips were cherry-ripe; her cheeks laughed rouge to scorn. The most innocent little dimple in the world, just away from the left corner of her mouth, pleaded for admiration. Around the pink and white perfections of her face was draped a veritable silken canopy of jet-black hair, brushed up and away from her forehead. Her eyes, to complete the picture, were large and violet, with limpid deeps where slow fires fumed uneasily; and they were shadowed by dark lashes that, when she let them droop, seemed to sweep her cheeks.

Elise lived in luxury. All the physical indulgence, all the sensuous comforts that money could command, were hers. Costly apparel,—which is, after all, the final consolation—the dream of undiverted women,—she possessed in extravagant variety, and wore with wasteful and capricious skill.

The protégée of Jacques Therdier wanted for nothing. A man of refined taste himself, it pleased him to see her always adorned; it satisfied the inherent business qualities of the gambler, well aware of the part her equipment must play, as assistant to his schemes. He knew, as well as she, the potency of a becoming gown, the subtle influence of rustling silk, the charm that a half-hidden bit of lace exerts upon the senses. All these airy accessories the woman managed with fine abandon, or with amazing modesty, to suit the occasion and the mood.

When Drake and Murphy were ushered in by the maid, Elise was snugly settled down among the pillows of a divan. She was lightly and brightly arrayed in green and scarlet—soft silken garments that clung to her undulous figure as if they loved to embrace her. She had a red rose in her hair, and her eyes shone as if the merry fires of a carnival were newly lighted in them.

"*Ah, Monsieur Murphy! Coquin!*" she exclaimed, half rising from her lounging position, and coquettishly pointing her finger at him. "You are no good, as you Americans say. Did I not listen patiently to your new system—did you not go down to try it, promising to return and tell me the wonderful result? *En fin de compte*, you never came back, and I waited for you."

"Oh, it didn't work," answered Murphy, sheepishly. "You needn't make fun of that system, though—it's all right. I was twenty dollars ahead once before I went broke; but I say, here's another newspaper man—a friend of mine. He's very anxious to meet you, Mam'selle Elise, and a right good sort he is, too."

Elise reached out a jewelled little hand and clasped Drake's warmly. Then, with an inviting movement, she flipped her flimsy skirts aside to make room for him beside her, showing her dainty slippered foot and a bit of black silk stocking.

"So you are a newspaper man, are you?" she exclaimed. "You don't play a system, I hope? Now, Monsieur Murphy would be quite interesting if he would talk of something besides systems, murders, and the morgue. By

the way," she said suddenly to Murphy, with a mock seriousness in the shaking of her pretty head, "I have a friend who is looking for you. I taught him that last system of yours."

"Oh, you did, did you?" retorted Murphy, with scorn. "Well, he didn't play it right, or he wouldn't have lost. I suppose that's the trouble with him, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered Elise, who seemed to be enjoying Murphy's discomfiture. "I told him to increase every bet, the same ratio, and stick to sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen; and while he might lose for a long time," she went on, smilingly, "when he did win, it would only take a few bets to make him even."

"Well, did he?" inquired Murphy, with some curiosity.

"Oh, he stuck to it, all right—played until he lost five hundred dollars without winning a bet; then he quit in disgust. *Après!*—the very next roll, the ball dropped into seventeen." She uttered a little shriek of merriment at the recollection.

"Of course!" exclaimed Murphy, in deep disgust. "He didn't have the nerve to stay with it."

"*C'est ça!* Just what I told him," assented Elise, "and so he went back and tried it again.

He lost another five hundred straight, and swore he would kill the man who invented the system. *Hélas!* he hadn't got to the door to hunt you out when the dealer called, 'Seventeen r-e-d!' And as he slammed the door, again the voice of the dealer floated out into the hall, 'Repeater! Seventeen r-e-d!'"

"What did I tell you!" declared Murphy, excitedly. "You've got to have nerve. Now, if he had stuck to the system and continued on the seventeen, it would have put him ahead of the game; but, Allan, old man, I'll leave you with Mam'selle Elise—take that five you lent me, and try my luck."

Murphy went downstairs whistling a ragged bar of the last popular song. Drake and Elise watched him, highly diverted by the man's absolute faith in his system.

"You have not been down here before," began Elise, leaning forward with one hand supporting her chin and looking upward into Drake's serious face.

"No," answered Drake, earnestly, "though I've often wanted to meet you. I've heard——"

"Yes," interrupted Elise, and added, a trifle bitterly, "A protégée of Jacques Therdier is apt to be discussed. *Qu'importe!* What do they say of Elise?"

"It was Murphy," replied Drake, "who told me about you. He gave you the highest praise known in his vocabulary, and if you know Murphy, you should appreciate that."

Elise laughed lightly, and then more soberly said: "Well, Monsieur Murphy is all right. Anyhow, I like him. He is good-hearted, *malin*, understands things, and is a lot better than most of the men I meet."

"Yet you see some of the best men in town, don't you?" And, watching her curiously, "Therdier has the reputation of being square."

"*Certainement*, plenty of prominent men come here. Lawyers,—lots of them,—doctors, and business men," Elise rejoined, naïvely. Then, with a sigh, "That's all very well; but play brings out the worst that is in them." She uttered this bit of ancient wisdom with a decisive nod of her head to emphasise her words. "It doesn't take long to discover their special weaknesses and vanities. I have a fair idea of them to start with, and know how to manage most of them."

"But," protested Drake, hesitatingly, not wishing to be presumptuous, "why, then, do you live in a place like this—a gambling-house?"

"*Et, pourquoi pas?*" answered Elise, with

a change of expression and a shrug of her shoulders. "Women love luxury, beautiful gowns, and flattery—you ought to know that well enough. Well, I have them all here. *Oui, tout.*" She cast a sweeping, satisfied glance at herself and surroundings, and settled herself comfortably among the pillows. Suddenly her mood changed; she grew contemplative, serious.

"I hardly know why I should," she went on rather sadly; "but I'll tell you about myself. I was born in France. My mother was a Frenchwoman—an actress. My father—an Italian nobleman. After a year he deserted her and returned to Italy, and soon after she died in abject poverty. Jacques Therdier, a distant connection of hers, adopted me. He ran a gambling-house then as now, and as I grew older I became valuable to him. Men said I was beautiful—raved over me—came there—lost their money. I had offers of marriage from a lot of foolish men—could even have been a countess." This Elise emphasised with a prideful lift of her little head, and coyly waited until she considered her visitor was sufficiently impressed; then resumed in a subdued tone: "One night a wealthy young man, *fou de moi*,—in love with me,—shot himself in our rooms because I would not marry him. His

father was a—how shall I say it?—a big man in France, and we were forced to fly from Paris. We went to London. The authorities drove Therdier from there. We came to New York, and finally to Denver, because Therdier had heard of the fabulous sums hazarded at play by rich mine-owners. *Voilà!*"

Drake was looking at her in fascinated silence. He even forgot to mention the subject foremost in his mind—the object of his visit.

"*Allons!* Monsieur Drake, never mind me." Elise rose and crossed the room with easy, listless grace. On a table were some roses, and, stopping to arrange them, she said with animation:

"Why not go for our friend, the amusing Monsieur Murphy? Bring him up here and have a little supper with me."

Drake was about to protest, but Elise, with an airy, insisting wave of the hand, would not listen to him. After he had gone she seated herself, her head in her hands, her elbows on her knees, and remained for some time in deep thought. A strange look of sadness, weariness, was on the beautiful face. Something about Drake attracted her; he was different from most men that she had met. The entire absence of any flattery or devotion in his manner was

a novelty. Instinctively she felt that here was a man that could be a friend, not in the sub-meaning of the word, but in its highest sense. Lovers were plenty—always at her feet. They bored her. A friend she longed for. Quickly arousing herself from her revery, she touched a bell; a maid entered.

"Christine!" she ordered, "bring in here—serve on this table—*un petit souper*. There will be three of us."

Drake found Murphy on the point of placing his last dollar on the zero—the system discarded. As it was swept away by the insatiable rake, Murphy, blissful, as if he had won instead of lost, followed Drake, and was soon drinking the health of Elise and in the best of spirits.

Elise presided with alternate moods of playfulness, dignity, and languor. An hour later, as they walked homeward, Drake silently acquiesced in Murphy's exclamation:

"Isn't she a dream!"

CHAPTER VI

Ah! but a juice too pure hath now been poured
In a dark and ancient wine; and the cup seethes.
—Stephen Phillips.

"Marcia! Do please come and eat your dinner!"

The old servant stood in the doorway of the living-room and spoke coaxingly, yet commandingly, with an ominous shaking of her fine grey head that betokened deep solicitude as well as subdued protest against such liberties as were being taken with the established order of things in the Woolford household.

"Wait just a little longer, Mollie, and if he doesn't come, then I'll dine alone."

"Dearie me! I wouldn't wait. Seems to me he's old enough to take care of himself. He's so busy these days, too; doesn't half eat when he does sit down. Just like his father there. He forgot to eat lots of times, thinkin' over them law cases. That's before he went to the war, and——"

Mollie's voice died away into the regions of overdone roast beef, whither she went to preach

to the cook the Christian virtues of patience and humility.

Henry was late for dinner—later than usual; for he seldom left his office in time to reach home when expected. Marcia sat at a window that commanded a view of the street, watching for a sight of her brother's tall form striding homeward. Darkness—a quick November gloom—had long since night-robed the earth; a dry wind tore the last dead leaves from the trees, and sent them, in panic-stricken multitudes, scurrying up the avenue. The arc-lamps, swaying in the breeze and creaking dolefully, played pale rainbow-rings upon the pavement, and pretended thus to illuminate the world. There is something egotistical and petty, like the absurd garrulity of an ignorant old man, in the sputtering glare of an arc-lamp. The sun, moon, and stars go about their lantern business with large indifference, but the best lamp ever made requires that it be petted, coaxed, and noticed like a spoiled baby, else it will go out and sulk in darkness till some tired man with a ladder comes to shake it back into usefulness and good behaviour.

When Henry came at length, it was with swift and nervous step. He brought with him

a little gust of chilling wind that buffeted Marcia as she hurried to meet him. She saw that his face was paler than usual, though perhaps the strong light in the hallway heightened the pallor. His manner, ordinarily serene, was now disturbed; his eyes burned in their deep recesses, like the fires of a furnace seen far through the night; and Marcia, filled with a vague anxiety, knew somehow that her dread was not unfounded; that her brother was in one of those strange moods of his, which troubled her more than she had dared to confess, even to her inmost self. He devoted such mighty efforts to his cases that at times he seemed to live in them, to suffer the agonies of the accused; and Marcia feared, because of the incessant toil involved in his application to these tasks, that his health would break under the strain.

She helped him to remove his coat. When she spoke, her voice, always soft and low, was caressing in its melody, and gave no hint of the disquietude she felt. Some women's voices—some women's very presence—can sweeten and assuage, like certain phases of a symphony played pianissimo on a great cathedral organ. This was Marcia's gift.

"Well, little girl, it's been a long day.

Many annoying things have happened, and I'm tired," said Woolford, stroking his sister's forehead affectionately. "We're late for our dinner, but never mind! I'll enjoy your sunshine—sunshine still when the sun's gone down. Ah! not many men can look forward to that after a day of gloom. It's gloomy, that's what it is, Marcia, this living to save the lives of fools. What is it that Macbeth says? 'To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow'—what's that?—'And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death.'—Come on! Let us sit down."

"You study too hard, Henry," Marcia remonstrated. "If you don't rest, you'll be ill. Indeed you will."

"Never fear, my dear," responded Henry, a tender light coming into his eyes as he looked into her upturned face. "Never fear. These moods of mine don't come from overwork. Work! Why, these cases are mere child's play. And yet they call it work—these lawyers who plod along, wrapped in their self-conceit. Why, Marcia, sometimes a wild notion strikes me to give up my profession and live henceforth apart from men—a recluse—in some deserted place, where I should never have to see people. Oh, how unendurable they become!"

Marcia was silent. Henry reflected a moment, and then went on:

"Work, labour, power. They are relative terms, after all. It has been said that no one can set a limit to the accomplishments of nervous force. Nervous energy—it's that which enables a delicate, frail woman, in a passion, to twist and break iron bars with her naked hands; which gives a man the strength, in some mighty rage, to snap asunder chains, to overpower men of many times his physical capacity, like toys and wisps of straw. There are times when I understand—when I can feel this tremendous force. It's after I've been thinking, with every faculty of my mind engaged upon the subject, whatever it may be. Gradually the difficulties disappear; the knots untie themselves; the texture unweaves itself; the whole thing dissolves; the details are there in absolute simplicity; nothing is concealed from me—nothing."

While he talked his look of weariness vanished. A glow came upon each cheek, which before had been almost cadaverous. His words began to flow like a torrent. He spoke not so much to Marcia as to some imagined audience —perhaps chiefly to himself.

"The mood is the thing, after all. Give me but the will to do it—the spell of single inten-

tion—the desire and the determination—and there is nothing I could not do. They all said I'd fail in that last case, Marcia. Half the lawyers in Denver chuckled and triumphed in advance over my certain failure in the conviction of my client. They said the evidence against him was positive and complete. They were willing,—yes, eager,—to witness the young lawyer's downfall; those old men, impregnated with musty theories and perked up in the tinsel glories of the ancient code. How little they knew, poor idiots!"

Woolford leaned forward in his chair, his deep-set eyes flashing, his lips curved with a scorn that was almost terrible. He was confidence incarnate, contempt in apotheosis.

"When I stood at last before that jury," he continued, "the evidence in, the case against me, the judge resolved, the lawyers all expectant—they thronged the courtroom that day—I said within myself that I would win. From that instant there was no doubt of it. My client might that very minute have been allowed to walk from the courtroom free. The case lay in my mind as clear as feldspar, as logical as truth itself. I had but to marshal the facts, move them in stately procession, colour them with meaning, and the jury would be over-

whelmed. As I talked I felt lifted up, inspired, exhilarated. The whole range of human emotions was spread out before me like the keyboard of a mighty organ. I played, and played, and played, shifting from the little treble notes of fancy and phantasm to the deep bass chords of passion, pity, and pain. Ah! that was glorious.

"I remember the judge—pompous, pretentious, and pranked out in all the petty dignities of his position. On his face was the look of one that bears the burden of the world—the air of an Alexander who 'assumes the god, affects to nod, and seems to shake the spheres.'

"There was the prosecuting attorney, nervous and aggressive, half afraid that he had not impressed the jury (and the audience) with his oratorical abilities in the speech he had just concluded; half fearful that he had neglected some important point that would have told against the prisoner; almost pitying the poor wretch whose body he had consigned to the gallows because, forsooth, it was his duty; and, at the mere thought of duty, becoming himself again, in smug self-satisfaction.

"Then there was the prisoner at the bar, his head bent to one side, as if he practised to

dodge the rope that dangled almost within his vision, shifting his bulging eyes from judge to jury, from prosecutor to the man whose words might yet save him from death.

"And, last of all, there was the jury, honest men enough, but mostly stupid, convinced by the lawyers that they were paragons of virtue and exemplars of wisdom, resolved upon doing justice, every man according to his light, such as it was. I almost laughed as I thought of the child's game I was playing with those puppets. But it was a serious business, as human business goes—serious surely to the poor devil in the box. I conserved my power. I practised carefully on those twelve keys before me, and studied the responses that I got. My client should be acquitted. That is what I told them—told them—told them—so that they could not doubt it. One by one I felt them coming under my influence. Steadily I mastered them. One was stubborn beyond the rest. It was a keen delight to draw him, play with him, compel him, subdue him. Finally I was the master of them all. This I knew to the very bottom of my soul. Besides, the judge knew it and the prosecutor knew it, for I could see the knowledge in their faces. Then, knowing that I had won, I put forth all the reserve of energy that

was in me. I lifted that jury to the heights of virtue, and dropped them into the depths of pity; carried them far into the pure realms of civic duty, and back through the worlds of disappointment and of tears. No power on earth could then have wrested a verdict of guilty from those twelve men."

In the fever of his strange soliloquy Woolford had risen from his chair and had taken to pacing the room. He now seated himself again, and, with a long indrawing of his breath, turned half-smiling toward his sister, who through the latter part of his speech had sat spellbound. Well as she knew his intensity and the workings of such moods as this, she was more amazed at every recurrence of them. Composing herself, she came up to her brother, placed her arms around his neck, and pleaded with him.

"Why, you're all in a fever, Henry," she said. "Please don't make yourself ill."

Woolford stood up, shook himself as if he were awaking from a sleep; and the gaunt, tired look came back into his face.

"I suppose I do forget myself, sister. 'Something too much of this,' as Hamlet would say. Hamlet would say so many things that fit, you know. But come! We'll have no

more of these cases to-night. You shall read to me, Marcia. Where were we? I think a little of old Antoninus would be good now—unless you'd rather finish 'Lammermoor' with me. Come."

CHAPTER VII

We are no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
Round with the Sun-illumin'd Lantern held
In Midnight by the Master of the Show.
—FITZGERALD'S *Omar.*

IN the two weeks that followed the night of Drake's visit to the Therdier establishment he had been unable to obtain any substantial clue to the mystery.

"Cultivate Woolford," had been the Patriarch's constant advice. "He broke loose once and talked, and he'll do it again."

Drake was reluctant, for he felt in approaching Woolford a hesitancy such as he had never before experienced. In this dilemma there came to him a happy thought. Dr. Hammond, his mother's physician, and once his father's closest friend, was also the Woolfords' trusted doctor. He could give him the requisite personal introduction. Drake shrank a little from this scheme, but finally told Dr. Hammond frankly what he wanted, and gave his reason for desiring to know the lawyer socially.

"Oh!" said the old doctor, with a twinkle

in his eye. "You met Marcia, too, did you, when you interviewed him?"

"Yes," answered Drake, confused; but the cause of it he could not in that instant have explained, even to himself.

"Are you sure your only purpose in seeking Woolford's acquaintance is business?" continued the physician, quizzically. "Now own up, sir! Hasn't that pair of very bright eyes and that lovely face something to do with all this, eh? I'm afraid you're very like your father, Allan."

Drake protested honestly enough that only his enthusiasm in the case had prompted this request; but he could not save himself from stammering a little, and he was sure his face had coloured deeply.

"Well, well, Allan! Liking Marcia is nothing to be ashamed of. She is about the best and sweetest girl that ever lived. Mary and I have been married forty years, and the other night she said to me, 'John, I've never had any cause to be jealous; but I declare if it ain't getting scandalous how you adore that girl Marcia! If you weren't nigh onto seventy years old I'd be getting kind o' worried.'" Dr. Hammond laughed till he hiccoughed, and held his sides with his hands.

"All right, Allan," he said at last. "I'll ask Henry and Marcia to dinner, and you and your mother can meet them. I'll tell Henry he's got to help you out on this thing. If you're bound to be a newspaper man, we've got to put you on top of the heap."

After the dinner at Dr. Hammond's home, the lawyer responded with such courtesy and friendliness to the physician's warm recommendation that only a few days later Drake was invited to dine with Henry and his sister. Marcia was in buoyant spirits that evening. She wore a pale blue gown that harmonised in some unusual way with the deep, sunset hues of her hair—a combination of colours that, when successful at all, compensates amazingly for the hazard of it.

Several times while they were at table Drake found himself looking at Woolford, as if compelled. The lawyer's talk was singularly interesting, perhaps more because of his manner than what he said. They were talking of the part chance plays in the ordering of men's lives. Woolford became silent and ruminative. After a short interval, lifting his eyes from the table, he said in a low, slow tone:

"The spectacle of human life is to me like some fantastic scene in which a rabble of har-

lequins, buffoons, and mountebanks are struggling, pushing, hurrying along a broad highway, knowing no more whither they go than whence they came; but all are forced on continually, as if by some invisible and irresistible power, some strange and unknown purpose."

He paused, and his attitude reminded Drake of a tragedian who has become so identical with the heavy part he plays that he is unconscious of his audience.

"Now and then one of the mob," the lawyer continued, "emerges to one side, out of the pathway of the human stream. He halts, looks ahead, and as far as the eye can reach are the contending thousands; he gazes backward, and out of illimitable distance pours the current of contorted and distorted humanity. As he is constituted for sorrow or for mirth, he is suddenly overcome by grief or laughter; and he would fain lay down his burden. But the iron prod of the inevitable goads him on, and once more he is swallowed up in the helpless, incoherent mass of fools—these zanies who are to go on for ever, fantastic in their griefs, ridiculous in their joys."

As he concluded, Drake was at once struck with the resemblance of his metaphor to that grotesque procession in "Notre Dame," and of

a scene in Hawthorne; but somehow the imagery employed by Woolford, old though it may have been, took on a strange freshness and a sinister meaning that made it new.

"I do not at all agree with my brother's philosophy," said Marcia, a little later. "The extremes of life have little attraction for me, except for the lessons they teach. It is so much nicer to take a happy view of things. Don't you think so, Mr. Drake?"

"To be able to do that all the time is to have a special gift from the gods," answered Drake, appreciatively.

"If one could go right down the middle of life, and escape the extremes of joy and sorrow, wouldn't that be the fortunate thing?" continued Marcia, a bright smile lighting up her face.

"'As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,'" added Drake.

"That's it!" exclaimed Marcia. "But Henry doesn't want troops of friends—prefers troops of enemies, I think," said the girl, half mischievously.

"I'm somewhat indifferent as to that," remarked the lawyer.

The contrast between brother and sister was a little puzzling to Drake. Marcia was cheer-

ful in disposition, broadly sympathetic, and filled with health and vigour. Henry seemed to be impelled by a cold, harsh cynicism.

As time went on, and Drake became a frequent and welcome visitor at the Woolford home, the vague feeling of antipathy that had come to him that night when he first met Henry had magically disappeared, save that when he now and then encountered the lawyer in one of his sombre moods the old sensation mastered him again. With Marcia he was always at ease and happy.

In the library one day they were searching many books for a certain disputed passage. Drake, sitting in a low chair, with his head bent low, and with his mind intent upon his purpose to settle the controversy, was slowly turning the leaves of a volume. Marcia, in a kind of girlish abandon to the fever of the pursuit, was seated plump upon the floor, her face flushed with the exercise, a score of old books scattered around her. Like a fair flower, all pink and golden, blooming in some ancient quarry, among stained but imperishable fragments hewn centuries ago, Marcia's fresh and shining presence there in the library gave a touch of lively pathos to those chronicles of dead men's thoughts.

"Do you know," Marcia said, impulsively, as she brushed back a vagrant lock of hair, "I think we get along famously together."

"Strange that I was thinking of the same thing," Drake rejoined, secretly gratified.

"Before you came to our house," continued Marcia, regretfully, "we rather discouraged callers. Henry isn't fond of society."

"Neither am I. I dislike the set affairs of society as much as your brother does, I fancy," Drake said, earnestly. "I like to meet you in this manner—to come and go like a nomad—to wander along the way we do; and I can't tell you how much I enjoy these talks we have—you and I."

Drake watched her smile suddenly grow serious.

"Have you found any clue to the strangler?" she asked, abruptly changing the subject.

"I haven't despaired, though it seems an endless task."

Marcia watched the clouds come and go across his face. "Sometimes I almost hope he will escape," she confessed, with a shudder. "I have a greater dread of that case than any other my brother has had."

"That's like a woman—wanting a murderer

to escape," Drake said, with gentle reproof. And then, after a pause: "The farther I go into the case the more important those flowers —the red carnations your brother told about— seem to me. I wonder——"

"I think Henry looks for them to solve the mystery."

"I believe they will," continued Drake, growing interested. "The other day I took a piece of the cord they were tied with—you will remember hearing that all three bouquets were tied with exactly similar string—to every florist in the city. It was common twine, such as is generally used in grocery stores. Not a single florist in town used cord of the same thickness, texture, or colour. Strange!" he concluded. "Everything I touch in this case —everything, gives back a suggestion of inscrutability. As you say, something weird and exasperating."

Drake rose from his chair; and Marcia, scrambling to her feet, exclaimed with a merry laugh: "We haven't found that passage yet!"

"No, it's almost as hard to locate as the strangler," said Drake, joining in the laugh. "You may be right; but if Montaigne said it, the translator has put more music into the words than translators usually give to the fine

sayings of those old fellows. It fairly sings in my head now, only I can't quite grasp it all. 'A friend should bear his friend's infirmities, but'—something or other. It sounds to me like Shakespeare—a common quotation, too, I suppose. At any rate, I'm going to take this volume of Montaigne home with me, if you please, and give you all the chance in the world to be right."

CHAPTER VIII

Go, stalk the red deer o'er the heather,
Ride, follow the fox if you can.
But for pleasure and profit together,
Allow me the hunting of man,—
The chase of the human, the search for the Soul
To its ruin,—the hunting of Man.
—Rudyard Kipling.

The following evening, as Drake walked towards the French Quarter, he reflected with a passing qualm of self-reproach upon the anomalies and contrasts with which his life was filled. Last night, Marcia; to-night, Elise and Therdier. He felt the blood painting a protest in his cheeks, and quietly checked it with a laugh.

"See here, old man," he said to the inmost Drake, "this won't do. There is no place for tender scruples in your business. This sudden modesty! But how easy it is to justify everything—thoughts, words, deeds—on a business basis! No wonder some men envy us our immunities; covet our privileges to go everywhere; to know anybody—even Richard Therdier."

There was a great difference between the brothers — Richard and Jacques Therdier. Naturally, in a city like Denver, where the French population is not very large, they were bound to have some acquaintances, business relations, and interests in common. It was perhaps in outward appearance that they were the more dissimilar; Richard was stout, coarse, slovenly in appearance. He and his wife, Diane, had never risen above the majority of their compatriots, or knew the better class of Frenchmen or Americans.

Jacques, on the contrary, was an acknowledged leader. Well-read, courteous, refined, careful as to his dress, he dominated his countrymen, and had many friends in the city. The fact that he owned a gambling-house, as might be expected, debarred him from certain circles that, had his business and environment been otherwise, would have welcomed him as a desirable acquaintance. He had never married. His relations with his ward, Elise, were more like father and daughter, and as such he regarded her. He adored, petted, and spoiled her, but never for one instant forgot the value of her services as an attraction that lured and cajoled men to gamble with him.

The murder of Diane Therdier, although

there had never been any familiar relations between the two establishments, followed by the accusation against his brother, aroused all the intense fighting spirit that was in the man. He at once took charge of the case, retained the services of Woolford, and, as the leading spirit of the secret organisation, called out all its resources.

"*Compagnie!*" What was this inscrutable, mysterious society? Drake experienced anew the unpleasant feeling compounded of dread and fascination that the name always bred in him. In his newspaper experiences he had encountered its members many times; and as well as an outsider could, he knew its wealth and power; that its actual name, "Le Cercle Fraternel," but always referred to by both French and Americans as the "Compagnie," was a convenient, serviceable title—an expansive blanket to cover its operations; that it was composed solely of Frenchmen; that whatever its hidden purpose and object, secrecy was always maintained, its members were under oath, disregard of which met with swift and terrible reprisals.

Drake, on his way to Therdier's, revolved in his mind many plans. He was convinced that only through this society could this maze of

murder be made clear. He must find a way into their secrets, and could devise no better plan than to go straight to Elise, tell her precisely why he had come, and ask her categorically if the "Compagnie" knew anything about the crimes. He did not expect a frank, truthful answer, but hoped that thus taken by surprise, she might unwittingly, by some action, word, or look, give him the hint he sought.

Jacques Therdier and Elise were alone in their apartment. The latter, gowned in vivid crimson, a string of superb jewels clasped around her throat, the usual red rose in her hair, was listening attentively to him. A casual observer would scarcely have noticed the slightest tension in their relations; yet the man, in full evening dress, smoking cigarettes incessantly, was visibly nervous—had something very acute disturbing him.

"Yes, it is only natural that I should be a trifle worried," Therdier was saying rapidly in French. "Richard's trial is only a short time off, and in spite of the supreme confidence of his lawyer that he will clear him, the fact that we cannot find this man who committed the deed exasperates me."

Elise made no reply. Therdier remained for

some time in deep thought. He was regarding her intently.

"Elise!"

"Yes."

"Diane Therdier and you never were friends, that I know; but did you ever hear of any one paying her special attention?"

"None that I can remember. Why do you ask?" There was nothing but idle curiosity in the question.

"Because one of my men has heard some rumours—terribly vague, to be sure—that there had been some one."

For a second only the face of the girl paled slightly; but the voice that replied was steady.

"It is evidently nothing but a stupid repetition of all the other stories. Bah! Imbeciles!"

Jacques Therdier rose. Apparently, he was relieved. "I must be going," he announced, looking at his watch. "We have a meeting to-night. You have nothing further to tell me?"

"No, I have been quite by myself, lately. A friend of Monsieur Murphy is about the only new face I have seen; probably just as rich," she replied with an insinuating gesture.

"Then, good-night!" Therdier went out. The moment the door closed, a look of anxiety

crossed the girl's face; a slight tremble passed over her frame.

"A meeting to-night!" she repeated to herself. "I must find out what they are doing!" The electric bell rang; it startled her; but by the time Drake entered, she was thoroughly composed, and lazily reclining in a great arm-chair. She did not attempt to conceal her surprise at seeing him.

"I thought you had forgotten all about me." She spoke in a tone suggesting something of pique and a little of reproach.

"No," answered Drake, apologetically. "I haven't been down this way lately."

"*Quoi?* You are not at work on your mysterious case?"

"That wasn't it," protested Drake. "I didn't suppose you would care especially to see me."

"I didn't say I wanted to see you! *Jamais!*" retorted Elise, elevating her chin. "I have been *triste*, to-day, and I am glad you came."

She drew a chair for him close to her own, and settled down to be amused. Drake was not in the mood to coax the pampered beauty into a good humour; and in disdain of her fascinations, promptly set to work to accomplish the object of his visit.

"Mam'selle Elise," he said, pleasantly, but with determination, "I came here to-night to speak with you about these crimes."

This cool, straightforward declaration struck an ominous little spark from the girl's eyes. Ignoring it, he went on:

"I would like to talk openly with you about the strangling case. You know that I am working on it, and wish to find the man who killed these women. I don't ask you to reveal any important secret — betray your friends. It means a great deal to me; and won't you say," he lowered his voice almost to a whisper, "whether the 'Compagnie' know anything— whether Richard Therdier is guilty or not?" Drake spoke slowly, with a significance that she could not mistake; watching her closely, hoping for some incriminating sign or gesture.

Elise remained passive, her eyes downcast upon a bit of lace at which her taper fingers were picking. Presently, her lips curled ever so little, and she looked up coldly to meet Drake's steady scrutiny.

"*Alors*,—that's what you came for, is it?" she said, in a low, hard tone. "You are not flattering, Monsieur Drake."

Both remained silent. Drake continued to look into her countenance searchingly; Elise re-

newed her attack upon the frill. It seemed a long time to him before she lifted her eyes again, and said more softly than she had yet spoken:

"I can assure you of one thing, and that is, that Jacques Therdier knows his brother to be innocent, and will spend every cent he has, if necessary, to prove it."

Another silence followed. Suddenly, she looked into Drake's eyes, her own afire with an emotion he could not analyse; then she sprang to her feet.

"Come with me!" she exclaimed, impulsively. She stepped into an adjoining room and quickly reappeared, throwing a dark long mantle over her head and shoulders.

"Come!" she cried again.

Surprised, with every nerve tingling, Drake followed her in silence. She led him through the hall to a back stairway, narrow and steep. Descending, they entered a kitchen where men in caps and aprons were busy around a huge, hot range. Some of them merely glanced; others did not look up from their occupation. The girl opened a door, and stepped out into the darkness. For a brief interval, they stood still until their eyes became adjusted to the blackness of the night. Dark vapours arose

from beneath their feet; they were in a muddy, murky alley. A few feet away was a dimly lighted street, where a few people loitered; looking far down the other direction, as if through a tunnel, was the feeble illumination of another thoroughfare. From both ways, from overhead, from the very walls and the ground beneath their feet, came the characteristic noises of the Quarter: distant laughter that was strident even in its faintness; the sing-song cries of tamale-men; harsh shouts and screeches; the muffled dissonance of instruments and voices—a medley of madly merry men and women, all desperately engaged in draining the last purple dregs from their shallow cups.

Drake felt Elise's warm hand steal into his and grasp it firmly. "*Allons! Allons vite!*" she exclaimed. Unerringly she picked her way over the mud and the rubbish, still clutching tightly Drake's hand to guide him. Men passed them at intervals. Drake could not see their faces, but Elise whispered, as one stepped out of their way, "Keep close to me! Pay no attention to any one! Those were some of them! The 'Compagnie' has its spies everywhere! You must not be recognised!"

Something in her voice caused Drake to

look swiftly toward her; but the darkness hid her face. She puzzled him more and more.

They were midway of the alley now. To their left, the rear walls of five- and six-story business blocks rose sheer above them. Feeble lights struggled here and there through unwashed window panes. On the right, were tall, jagged fences, whose irregularities left obscure vacancies which, to Drake's straining fancy, appeared to be alive with sombre shapes and shadows. At last they came to a spot, almost at the alley entrance, where a patch of light lay upon the ground. It came from the open rear door of a barroom. Across the alley from this door was the rear entrance of a ramshackle building, four stories high. Here, they entered a little hallway. Through a door that stood ajar, Drake could see a group of pale Frenchmen playing cards. Further toward the front, another group stood around a billiard table.

Elise conducted Drake up a crooked stairway, through a long low passage, which had many smaller passages leading away from it; up another tortuous stair and along another hall; and finally led him into a small room near the front of the building.

"Stay here till I come back," she said, quietly, and closed the door behind her.

Drake leaned against the wall and waited—waited a long time, so it seemed to him in the darkness. Presently, the door was opened softly; Elise whispered to him to follow her. He thought there would never be an end to the dark passages. After a while, they approached a spot where he could see, through a window, an arc-lamp, like a star, far away in the night; and near the window a faint rectangle of yellow light upon the wall. At the sound of voices, they stole forward on tiptoe, till they reached an angle, where the passage turned abruptly to the right. Elise grasped Drake's arm, drew him cautiously beyond the angle, and not daring to speak, pointed.

Drake looked sharply in the direction she indicated. Scarcely a dozen feet away, four men around a table were playing cards and talking in low tones. The door of the room stood open, and a lamp lit up the faces of two of them. Drake could not recollect having seen either of them before. He was studying their dark countenances when Elise gripped his arm tightly, and quickly pulled him with her into the window's deep recess. The sound of footsteps had reached her ears, and soon a man came



"'THEY DON'T KNOW THAT'S CERTAIN THEY DON'T KNOW—YET.'"

hurrying toward them. As he passed beneath the kerosene lamp that furnished the sole illumination of the hallway, Elise whispered:

"Jacques Therdier."

She moved closer to Drake, and clutched his shoulder with both hands. Pressing as hard as they could against the window-panes, their bodies were barely within the shadow of the recess. They held their breath while Therdier passed—so near, that he might have felt their presence, had he not been so intent upon his business.

When Therdier had joined the men, the door was left wide open, as if no thought of possible listeners had occurred to them. The cards were put aside, and all entered into animated conversation; their voices, though low and guarded, were clearly audible. Elise bent eagerly forward, straining to catch the words.

"Well, what have you found?" inquired Therdier, brusquely, in English.

"Nothing yet," answered one; "but we think we're on the right track."

Drake felt a little tremor pass through Elise's body. He wondered if she feared they might reveal too much to him. Another man spoke; this time, in French. The men huddled around the table. Elise, holding her breath,

leaned forward in front of Drake, one hand resting on his knee, the other upon his arm. Her hair brushed his mouth, and he felt the tremulous rise and fall of her bosom against his arm. Gradually the men spoke louder, their words accompanied by angry gestures. Suddenly Elise brought her face round to his, so that she could look into his eyes.

"You do not understand, *n'est-ce pas?*" she muttered in a low voice, quivering with excitement.

"No, not one word."

Her hands perceptibly loosened their grasp; she breathed a deep sigh. Instinctively, Drake felt that it was a relief to her.

The men at the table once more became quiet, listening to the earnest utterances of one of their number. He spoke calmly, and with precision. Elise was scarcely breathing, so intent was she on hearing everything said. Once, she could not restrain herself.

"*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the terrified girl. Finally, the conference ended. Therdier rose to go.

"Well," he concluded, dropping back into English, "find that man before my brother's trial comes off, and you shall have the money."

"We'll do it," said one of the four.

Therdier left them; and in the room the card game was resumed. Elise waited until Therdier had again passed, and the sound of his footsteps had died away before she cautiously beckoned Drake to follow her; and then together the breathless pair made their escape undiscovered.

"Who was the man they meant?" whispered Drake as they stole through the alley.

Elise was silent, and there was a shadow upon her face.

"They don't know," she answered, in an absent manner, "that's certain. They don't know—yet."

CHAPTER IX

This is as strange a maze as e'er men trod;
And there is in this business more than nature
Was ever conduct of: some oracle
Must rectify our knowledge.

—SHAKESPEARE'S *The Tempest.*

AFTER the night expedition with Elise, Drake determined to see Woolford and confer with him regarding the latest developments. He was eager to ascertain his opinion about the discovery that the Frenchmen themselves were hunting the strangler. He knew that the district attorney and the police were now quite satisfied with the imposing wall of circumstantial evidence that they had built around Richard Therdier. He decided to tell the lawyer what he had heard. His purpose was twofold: he wanted to help him free Richard Therdier, and at the same time to be assisted in his own investigations.

When Drake entered the lawyer's office, he found him alone and hard at work. Turning from his books and manuscript, he greeted him with outstretched hand—a sign to Drake that he was in a gracious mood. He listened atten-

tively to his story and heard him to the end.

"Yes," he said, quietly, "that was a very good night's work, Drake; but I knew it all before. They have no clue—none, at any rate, that amounts to much."

"You are sure of that?" asked Drake, somewhat crestfallen.

"Perfectly sure."

"Well, those fellows think they're going to earn that money."

Woolford laughed and, rising, began to gather up the papers that littered his desk. "Come up to the house to-night, Drake," he said, presently. "I'm going to take a final trip over the ground to be ready for the trial. You can go with me if you like."

"I'll be very glad to go," responded Drake, eager and grateful for the opportunity to study the case in the company of a man who could with such amazing ease discount his every effort, however artful or fortuitous, to unravel the tangled threads of this mystery. Was there any limit to the man? he asked himself. Was there anything Woolford did not know about these crimes, committed with diabolical deliberation and in astounding secrecy? What were the sources of his information? Could it be

that the lawyer was gifted with some sixth sense of instinct or perception which led him straight and swiftly to what common men must toil to reach? Drake's wonder grew with every minute he spent in Woolford's company.

It was about eight o'clock when they left the Woolford home and set out for the scene of the stranglings. The night was cool and clear, and the air was a tonic for tired nerves. From the south a light breeze blew, and in the west, where the radiant moonlight fell full upon them, white peaks sparkled above the blue mists of the foothills. Drake remarked that he had never seen a more lovely night; and he noticed that Woolford's eyes were bright and his step elastic, as if he too had been medicined with nature's magic remedies. The lawyer was indeed more frank and companionable than Drake had ever known this sombre, self-contained, and unsociable man to be. As they walked he poured out a stream of talk that led presently to the subject that was, at that time, paramount in the minds of both.

"When I was in college," said Woolford, "we had a professor of higher mathematics who was known to have worked on a problem forty-eight hours without ceasing, for the pure satisfaction of having solved it. Mathematics

was his chief pleasure,—his hobby, if you please, as crime is mine. Unless you have gone into this case deeper than people who write so glibly about these things usually do, you cannot know the fascination there is in the study of crime—the spur that the motives and the moods of men can give to mental effort. And the true method is simple——"

"The true method! What is it?" asked Drake, astonished.

"Thoroughness — that's the word. Leave nothing unquestioned or unanswered. When you have mastered all the points of the defence in your client's case, go over to the side of the prosecution and find out what there is in it. Place yourself in the shoes of the detectives; warp your mind to their attitude of disbelief and brutal incredulity. Then, when you have studied every phase of the crime, from every point of view, go back to your client knowing how he stands, what you may expect for him and against him, and so be prepared for every possible emergency. A good way to prove that your client is not guilty is to find the guilty man."

"But that sort of preparation—isn't it pretty difficult in a case so unique and so infernally baffling as this one?"

"All the more fascinating, then," responded the lawyer. "Here is the very masterpiece of the extraordinary criminal. Here is a crime conceived, planned, and executed with almost superhuman cunning. And yet cunning may be overcome—may even overreach itself, and point the way to its own undoing. Reason—cold, hard logic! What can mere craftiness avail in a contest with the mental force that moves from premise to conclusion as unerringly as Tell's arrow, and as relentlessly as a Juggernaut. Let us match our reasoning powers, our capacity for pure, concentrated thought, against the cunning and the craft of the strangler, and we shall win. The contest may be long, for craft is resourceful and cunning, as elusive as the wind; but in the end, when we have freed Therdier so that no man shall doubt his innocence, then, Drake, we shall reveal the real criminal."

All this he uttered in a voice and with a manner of such inscrutable assurance that Drake, for all that he knew, or thought he knew, the intensity of the lawyer's nature, turned a look of astonishment upon him. They were just then in the full glare of an arc-lamp, and he could see that Woolford's face was set in a kind of straightened calmness, albeit there

was in his eyes the burning he had marked there many times before.

It was with a changed voice that the lawyer presently continued:

"That was a good point you made the other day—I mean about the string around the carnations. You found that not a single florist in the city uses that kind of string on the flowers he sells. It was very good work, Drake, but you didn't go far enough."

"How is that?" asked Drake.

"If you had studied the carnations themselves you would have discovered that they were unusually large, and that they had certain qualities found only in flowers grown in a hothouse. I made a more thorough investigation than you, and learned that common grocery-store twine, like that with which the flowers were tied, is not used in any department, for any purpose, in any of the floral establishments of this city. It is plain, therefore, that *he substituted* common twine for the string that held those carnations when they left the greenhouse."

"Couldn't the substitution have been mere chance, and not deliberate intention?" asked Drake.

"It might have been," said Woolford, read-

ily, "if the substitution had been made only in the first case; but recollect, Drake, that the carnations were in every case precisely similar, that there were thirteen flowers in every bunch, and the string was always the same in size, colour, and texture."

"But *he* might have got the carnations from some other place—out of the city, perhaps, or——"

"No. They were fresh when found lying by the bodies. They could not have been brought from a distance. And while they were very common species of carnations, they could not have been grown in any other atmosphere than that of a hothouse. They were grown either in a public greenhouse or in a private conservatory. If in the first, common twine was not used in tying them together. As for the second, there are few private conservatories in Denver, and their owners and the other persons who have access to them are entirely above suspicion. You can prove that for yourself, if you want to."

"Well, then!" exclaimed Drake, "what about the substitution? What is your deduction? Does it add anything to your conclusions? Is it——"

"Why, man, it is everything!" replied

Woolford. "The incident of the carnations showed that the criminal is an extraordinary man, but the substitution of the string marks him for a master in cunning. It suggests the most subtle design the human mind is capable of. It is a glaring signboard pointing the way to the murderer. It eliminates with one word every ordinary man from our consideration and singles out from the extraordinary a very small class. It enables you to draw a mental picture of *him*, and it gives you an insight into his character. When we come upon the guilty person I shall know him on the instant and beyond the possibility of mistake. In those carnations the cunning of the man has overreached itself, if we but use our brains to interpret their significance."

They were nearing Therdier's place, and the lawyer spoke more hurriedly, as if to finish quickly what he had in mind to say.

"You will readily recall the details of the Whitechapel murders," he went on. "That fiend left on each of his victims a peculiar bloody mark that proved him to be a brute thirsting for blood. The method of his crimes, together with their horrible surroundings, showed almost beyond question that he was some sailor insane with a lust for butchery. But no man ever

discovered a single clue to his identity. So in this case; the carnations are a token of a man of intellect, education,—and I will even say, refinement. He strangled his victims, and therefore he did not want to see blood flow. He carried nothing away, though there was money on the person of each of his victims; and so his motive was not robbery. The carnations signify that he carefully planned each crime—planned it with calculating, cold-blooded craft. That he was utterly fearless, you cannot doubt; and so I might go on from one characteristic to another till I had given you his portrait complete in every essential detail, and framed in the tarnished, ugly gilt of these surroundings."

The lawyer, upon uttering these last words, made a sweeping gesture with his arm, indicating the scene before them.

They were in the midst of the French Quarter, and the vicious activities of the slums were under full headway. Noises of revelry filtered through the worm-eaten walls, and harsh sounds burst unimpeded through open doorways. Paltry, painted lamps dropped a dim, disreputable blend of colour upon the street, and turned the moonbeams to a sickly yellow. Men and women in all the stages of intoxica-

tion jostled one another, and bandied coarse abuses back and forth. And permeating all was the indescribable odour of the Quarter, pungent, sickening, and suggestive. A bit of burning punk in a Chinese shop filled Drake's nostrils with a grateful perfume, and touched to his memory an incongruous vision, like a sweet interlude in a nightmare's agony,—a fleeting fancy of a distant church, and pale, pure light falling upon the heads of worshippers,—but in another instant he had stubbed his toe upon a jagged flagstone, and turning an involuntary malediction into a question, he asked:

"Do you know any one whom your description fits?"

Woolford was silent. When he finally replied, his brow was knit, his voice low and sibilant.

"There is a man, Drake, a man who might be a murderer, a strangler of women. He has accumulated great wealth, is splendidly educated, speaking fourteen languages; a painter of more than ordinary skill; a musician; no man in Denver a better chess-player; and is well-read in the best literature. At his best, he is a finer grained and brainier man than the Dr. Jekyll of Stevenson; yet, I can easily fancy

him a veritable Hyde in crime. Now, mark you, I believe this man is capable of having committed these murders; but I have not one scrap of evidence against him."

"You don't mean——" Drake was pointing towards the house they were fast approaching.

Woolford hesitated. "Yes. Jacques Therdier."

CHAPTER X

How life was naught but ray of sun, that
Clove the darkness thick and blind,
The ravings of the reckless storm, the
Shrieking of the rav'ning wind.

—*The Kasidah.*

THE trial of Richard Therdier had lasted full three weeks. It was now the final day of the stubborn, strenuous contest. None equal to it in virulence could be recalled by the oldest officers or by the most faithful frequenters of the criminal court of Arapahoe County. Stung to desperation by the taunts of Henry Woolford, the police had marshalled their witnesses in a manner that drew forth sensational allegations of perjury and persecution; while the district attorney, spurred by the great reputation of the counsel for defence, and deceived a bit, perhaps, by Woolford's demeanour, which was cold and seemingly indifferent through it all, had surpassed himself in his manipulation of the testimony and in his arraignment of the prisoner at the bar. Every day the courtroom had been packed by curious, prurient spectators; and on this terminal afternoon the crowd was

dense, expectant, impatient to gloat on the convicted and condemned Therdier—the strangler of women.

The judge had lunched well, and was now settled in his big, leathern chair, resigned to hours of oratory. The jurors had lunched, not quite so well, but to their satisfaction; their countenances wore more cheerful aspects than they had lately known. The prisoner, surrounded by phlegmatic bailiffs, had eaten scarcely at all, and now sat limp and pale, with eyes downcast. A beam of sunlight broke through a window-shade, and fell upon the white face of Woolford, where he sat quiet and introspective at the lawyers' table. He moved his head a trifle, and looked at a bailiff, who was at that instant absorbed in an admiring study of the judge. Feeling the lawyer's gaze upon him the bailiff turned precipitately; and hurried to adjust the blind. Nothing escaped the hungry eyes of the spectators, over whom there came presently a hush, when the district attorney rose, and began to arrange the papers on the green cloth before him.

"You may begin, sir," said the court.

The state's attorney certainly was at his best. He had studied the case with thoroughness; he had sifted the evidence with skill, and, more im-

portant than all else, had convinced himself that Therdier was guilty. His speech to the jury was masterly, impassioned, and, as it seemed, convincing. As he progressed in his narration of the crime—a narrative collaborated from the testimony of many witnesses, and unified with all the adroitness of a practised pleader—his words touched the very soul of his hearers; and drew from all that volatile assemblage, muffled exclamations of horror, loathing, and hate against the prisoner. So great was the commotion when, at the end of two hours, he sat down, mopped his brow and sank wearily into his chair, that the bailiff was compelled to hammer violently on a table to check the applause and the chorus of exultant cries. At that outburst the pallor on Therdier's face deepened to the livid, sickly hue of fear; for it was not so much an ejaculation of approval by men and women, as it was the panting, passionate utterance of wild beasts moved by the lust for blood —the sort of incoherent cry the swooning culprit hears when the mob hurries him to the stake.

The mask of innocence or bravado, or whatsoever thing it was, had long since fallen from Therdier's face. He was abject. The jurors looked at him shrivelling there in his chair. In

that scrutiny they seemed to find the evidence they sought, and asked themselves: "Would the innocent wear a countenance like that?"

Henry Woolford stood up to answer the interrogation. Through all the district attorney's arguments, appeals, and denunciation, he had sat unmoved. His face was as still and as chill as a mountain lake at evening; his manner quiet, almost indolent; only a menace in his deep grey eyes showed that he was not inert. He cast a slow and comprehending look around the room, looked at the posing judge, at the cowering prisoner, at the tumultuous crowd. A sardonic smile tortured his lips. He watched the spectators till one by one they caught his gaze and felt suddenly impelled to silence; and then, when the noise had died away, he faced the jury and began to speak.

It was a gentle, caressing voice, almost listless, and so very low at first that the jurors leaned forward to hear him; but for all its dulcet softness, the tone had some thin fibre in it that shivered and tingled on the ear like singing slivers of steel. The state's attorney had flattered and thanked the jury; but Woolford used no cajoleries. With a few simple, sterilising sentences, he swept away the heated mass of sentiment and heroics that had been pre-

pared to feed the jurors' virtuous prejudices. He compelled them to realise that justice does not thrive on vicarious sacrifice; that she does not demand the blood even of the vilest wretch, if that wretch be guiltless of the particular offence for which revenge is sought. He did not attempt to canonise his client, did not try to magnify his virtues, did not seek to minimise his faults; but told the jury just who and what his client was—a foreigner, ignorant and brutal.

His voice, by imperceptible degrees, had changed, hardened, lifted. As he went on, he was transformed. His muscular figure became erect; his eyes glistened; and the little red spot kindling in his cheek was like the glow of a furnace door, which tells of melting energy within. Bit by bit, he took the testimony and threw it all away. He held the police up to such convulsing ridicule that the judge must hide his face. The audience tittered; the district attorney gnawed the edges of his lip. He made a pitiable joke of the negro boy—the proud eye-witness of the murder. Of all the prosecution's elaborate structure of circumstantial evidence, he left not one stick or stone in place, but wrecked, demolished, and ground it to powder. Then he shifted from sarcasm,

ridicule, and invective; his voice dropped to its lowest register, and he dealt in terms of vice, misery, and horror. Faces around him sobered, blanched, twisted, as he told of the utter absence of reason for the death of Diane Therdier. With consummate skill he combated the theory that Diane Therdier had obtained secrets so important that it was deemed necessary to make away with her. He took his hearers to the scene of the murder, and into the house of Richard Therdier. He explained thoroughly the way it was arranged, and showed conclusively the ease with which the prisoner or his confrères could have taken the body out of the house, through the alley, and beyond, where it would never have been heard of again. After that, he dwelt on the outré features of the stranglings—the secrecy, the mystery; the flowers, the string; the terror and unreality of it all.

While his hearers sat amazed, transfixed, and breathless he walked over to a table on which were displayed all the ghastly evidences of the crime. He looked at the stain upon the pillow; lifted the silken gown with two fingers—held it a minute, and let it fall again; then, as if his imagination had been heightened, in a solemn, vibrating voice, he drew for them the picture of a madman, impelled by an insane desire to kill.

"An impulse," he said, "overpowering and all-compelling—a force, as irresistible and as frigid as a glacier, seized the man to kill—to kill a woman. We may suppose that for days he fought and struggled with it; that his soul revolted. Impossible, it was too strong. It grew, and raged, and pressed down upon his reason, till it crushed and dominated him. Then he ceased to resist—yielded—and began to plan the crime with all the cunning of a maniac. And while he planned, whether he slept or waked, always there was before him the vision of a woman, beautiful, voluptuous, with great moist eyes, and with red lips quivering with emotion, urging, pleading, imploring him to do this thing—to kill her.

"The hour approached when he must. He had not neglected the slightest detail of his subtle, wily design. He selected his victim with deliberation. He passed Diane Therdier's house; the woman was alone. He entered; then the demon in him broke loose. The moment had come. His blood ran hot and cold; his eyes flamed with frenzy; the room swam around him; a mist enveloped everything—everything but the white neck of the woman—the white and pleading neck of his vision. He seized her by the throat. She tried to scream; the sound

died away in a death-rattle. He threw her on the bed; his fingers tightened around her throat; his sinews were like steel; his body quivered with exultation. He was doing well the thing he had to do. The woman's limbs relaxed, her breathing ceased, the tongue protruded. It was all over. No, not yet! A little crimson stream burst from her mouth. The sight of it was repugnant—was alien to the preconception of the deed. Coolly and deftly he bound a handkerchief around her throat; then he looked at her long and critically, one knee still upon the bed beside her, leaned over and put his ear upon her breast. Her heart was still. He stood erect, passed his hand across his brow and felt his blood receding, his nerves becoming firm. He stepped before the mirror, and while adjusting his cravat, saw that his face was pale. He had passed through a frenzy, a convulsion, a crucifixion. Now, he was himself again. And before leaving that house to disappear in the evening's heedless throng, he did not forget to make his signature—to attest the deed—to mark the method in his madness. He placed a bunch of thirteen red carnations by her side."

Men paled; women's faces were distorted with hysteria, and a long-drawn sigh quavered through the courtroom. The twelve men in the

box, long since convinced by his magnetism and eloquence, were now spellbound and helpless, like the fantastically posed subjects of a hypnotist. No evidence could have moved them now.

Woolford, placing his hands on the railing of the jury-box, looked into the rapt and distracted faces before him, and concluded in a voice that was filled with total weariness and infinite appeal:

"Gentlemen of the jury! I have told you this strangler was a madman. Look at the prisoner! Is he mad? Look at him, I say, and tell the world that Richard Therdier is not guilty!"

He stood still, searching the faces of the jurors, while they obeyed him, and looked beyond him at the prisoner, Therdier. All eyes but Woolford's followed their gaze—all eyes obeyed, and saw—by what magic who can tell? —the face of Therdier altered, immaculate shining as the sun. The prisoner sat erect, his eyes calmly meeting all that concentrated scrutiny, his whole self declaring hope—aye, the certainty of salvation. He too was under the spell of that oratory.

Woolford sat down. The prosecution had the closing speech; but not once again did the

district attorney hold the attention of the jurymen. He made a gallant effort to destroy the stark impression Woolford's speech had made; he strove to recall to the jury's minds the testimony offered against the prisoner, and to remind them of the simple demands of justice. He endeavoured to be humble, and to stand there as the instrument of the law, rather than the ambitious lawyer, striving for mere victory; but all in vain. The jurymen, as often as he appealed to them more vehemently, turned their gaze again toward Woolford. It is doubtful if they followed the reasoning, or were even touched by the pleading of the district attorney, in his closing speech. Woolford had settled the thing for them long before.

In despair, preserving his poise with difficulty, the district attorney took his seat. The jurymen retired in the bailiff's care, and the audience was numb and voiceless, still beneath the spell. The judge looked mechanically at his watch, then at the clock upon the wall; and even as he looked, and when the hands had marked off scarce three minutes' time, and while the spectators were still breathing hard, the jury came in again, and was seated.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed upon a verdict?" asked the judge.

"We have," said the foreman, rising to his feet.

"The clerk will read the verdict."

"Not guilty!"

The audience, for half a minute, was as still as a forest before a storm. In that interval, the bailiff adjourned the court; and in another instant the storm had broken loose. Men and women, who a little while before were eager to tear the prisoner to pieces, now howled their approval and shrieked their mad delight. The shout that went up shook the building.

In the midst of the confusion, Woolford slipped away.

CHAPTER XI

The night has a thousand eyes,
And the day but one;
Yet the light of a whole world dies
With the dying sun.

—Bourdillon.

"I was just wishing you would come," said Marcia, "when the bell rang—and it was you —exactly like a good spirit in the Arabian Nights."

"I hope I'll always have the good sense to respond when you rub the magic lamp," Drake replied, as she pressed his hand to welcome him. He noticed, at a glance, that all the familiar animation was gone from her face; that there were traces of tears; and he felt a sudden prompting to take her in his arms and tell her how truly sorry he was. "You're very tired, aren't you?" he asked, uneasily.

"I'm worn out," she cried, dejectedly. "Let us sit out here on the verandah, the night is warm;" and she settled back in a comfortable chair.

Drake, seating himself beside her, asked, in a voice that was filled with solicitude: "What

is it? Tell me—I'd like to help you. May I?"

"I don't know how, unless—unless you tell me a story, as you would to a child in the nursery, whose tears you would drive away." She laughed, and then added somewhat sadly: "Henry has been at home since the trial, and I have hardly left his side. He has not been able to sleep till a little while ago; but he's resting now. The doctor says he'll sleep several hours. Oh, I'm so glad that dreadful case is settled! How I have hated it!"

Both were silent till Drake spoke again. He was thinking not so much of Henry's suffering as of Marcia's distress. He halted, searching for the right words to express his sympathy; but he could only gaze at her and trust that she would know.

"But we must all have our share of unhappiness," she continued; "and I suppose a little sorrow is good for us. It makes us look seriously at things, and drives some of the selfishness away."

They sat a long time in silence watching the summer sunset, while the mountains changed from sunny picture to purple silhouette; watched while the sun, like a red-cheeked boy, all tired out from his day's romp across the world, tum-

bled into his gorgeous bedchamber in the west; watched while the winds from the opiate Orient packed his couch with cloud-pillows as rich and evanescent as the Golden Fleece; watched while the night, old nature's immemorial nurse, drew the silken curtains of his aerial bed in successive folds of flame, saffron and violet; watched while the after-glow, the tired boy's good-night smile, faded from salmon-pink to rosy pearl, and went out at last in a silvery blue oblivion.

"'Behind the hills, that's where the fairies are;
Behind the hills, that's where the sun goes down.'"

It was Marcia speaking softly. She had leaned forward in her chair, with her elbows on her knees, her chin supported by her half-clasped hands, her dark eyes darkening more, as with the shadows of a dream. The sun's touch lingered in her hair long after the sun himself had gone to sleep. Drake, studying her mood, made the inward comment that he liked her thus best of all. To-night, more than ever, he felt moved to tell her many things he had never told her before—had never thought of telling. Perhaps it was because she had suffered and was still in trouble.

"Behind the hills!" she exclaimed. "We'd all like to know what is behind the hills. I read once, somewhere, that we're all, in our hearts,

no different from our primæval ancestors—all nomads. We're only staying a little while, that's all. Moving, seeking, never resting, never truly finding. Don't you always feel as if you must jump on the train when you see it starting for—well, for anywhere?"

Drake did not answer quickly; but leaned over and put one hand on the back of Marcia's chair. The breeze had loosened a few tresses of her hair, and his fingers touched them. Then he said, almost in a whisper:

> "'Over the world and under the world,
> And back at the last to you.'"

For a minute Marcia was still. Then, she threw back her head and laughed ever so softly.

"That's a Romany lass and a Romany lad you're speaking of. I'm not a gipsy, sir!"

"But the trail holds true, Marcia, the wide world over."

She did not laugh this time, but after a slight pause, went on somewhat hastily: "I wonder what there is in a sunset that makes us want things—long for we know not what—ache for something that we know in our hearts is not to be had by us. Now, a sunrise never makes me feel that way, and I have seen it rise over the mountains, out of the sea, and in all sorts of places. It is all so strange!"

"It has been a long time since I have seen a sunrise, except sometimes from the wrong side of it."

"The wrong side of it?" repeated Marcia, in astonishment.

"Yes. I'm often at work all night, and don't get to bed till after the sun is up. That's seeing it from the wrong side, isn't it?"

"How very queer it must seem," Marcia said, laughing.

Drake mused a little.

"Do you remember what Charles Lamb says about night?" he asked, presently. "He's a favourite of yours, and you should remember. Something about the miseries of our ancestors wintering in caves. Night was a horrid thing then, I'll admit. Who could be merry when you couldn't distinguish the olives from the oysters! Lamb says jokes came in with candles. Let us go on and say that song came with the oil-lamps, good-fellowship was ushered in by gaslight, and the after-dinner speech owes its perfection to the incandescent."

"Then the progress of man may be measured by the successive steps in artificial lighting? Is that it?" broke in Marcia.

"Quite so. We have cheated the night," continued he, "in much the same way the Hol-



MARCIA

landers cheated the sea." Suddenly he rose to his feet. "If you want to realise what a wonder-worker artificial light has been, just imagine that none has ever been invented. Look down yonder now: Denver at night!"

Drake gave his hand to Marcia and she stood beside him. They looked a minute or two, and then walked down the path to the middle of the lawn and stood there to gaze upon the enchanting scene. Below them, where the massive business buildings lay piled one upon another in the night, few lights were visible; but a blue-white mist shivered along the house-tops. On the left of this huge patch of glowing shadow, a street stretched straight away before them for miles and miles, its arc-lamps dwindling like graduated diamonds on a dangled strand. Here and there to the north and south, little clusters of lights peeped from among the houses and the trees like jewels among the laces of a woman's bosom. But far beyond the city proper, against the heaving background of the mountains, where the suburbs perched upon the hills —there the lamps dotted the horizon with fantastic figures: circles, serpents, spangles, and many eccentric designs, all of a hue—the blue-white, chill and scintillating hue of the electric spark.

"I have looked at it night after night, and I think it is beautiful," said Marcia, with enthusiasm; "but electricity to me somehow seems depressing, cheerless."

"And yet, it is more generous than the sun," ventured Drake, neatly. "Under the shaded lamp my lady's wrinkles disappear, and the lashes of her dreamy eyes grow darker. The——"

"The moon and the stars, the shadows, and even sleep are all friendly to our gentler selves," broke in Marcia, gaily.

"Sleep!" repeated Drake; "the only good thing I can say for that old villain Macbeth is that he murdered it. What a pity he didn't make a better job of it! Life is so short, Marcia, and there are so many things one might do, see, and know, if one only had time enough."

"Yes. Think of the books unread, and the pictures unseen," declared Marcia.

"And the fortunes that are unfound, the fame that beckons us in vain, the songs unsung, of all that is missed and lost by us for ever, because we must snore away one-third of our precious hours. And, in spite of all this, most of us go tumbling into our beds every night as if sleep were about to be abolished, and we were

compelled to store up a supply against the years."

"And there is really little need to worry about it," remarked Marcia, dreamily; "there is plenty of it coming—at the end."

A stillness fell upon them. Drake, looking at her, saw all the lights of the city, of the sky, and another light that "never was on sea or land" pure and steadfast in her eyes. Her face was flushed, her lips parted, tears glistened in her eyes. He seized both her hands in his; and she did not resist. Her gaze quickened and fascinated him; and for many a day thereafter her face, as it looked at that moment, was before him. It haunted his dreams—the sweetest and loveliest vision he had ever known.

"You are hurting my hand!" she exclaimed.

Her voice seemed to be a long way off, as if it came lifting over many odorous fields of summer to rouse him where he slept upon a bank of violets, by a chiming stream, dreaming the most beautiful dreams. Slowly, he realised that he was crushing her fingers in his grasp; and he dropped her hands reluctantly.

A long silence followed, broken at last by the servant calling and saying that Henry had awakened. Drake grudgingly led her to the door and bade her good-night.

CHAPTER XII

"But 'e run 'is 'and up to the top button of 'is shootin'-coat—an' loosed it. 'Thank you, sir,' I sez. 'I'd like that very well,' I sez, an' both our coats was off an' put down."

—Rudyard Kipling.

Hero-worship is not one of the notable traits of character in newspaper reporters, but loyalty and enthusiasm are common qualities that need but the fit occasion for the proving. Drake never sought to be popular, and, indeed, had even neglected to take the first steps toward popularity; yet, about this time, there occurred an incident which led his fellows to discover an unexpected phase of his character, and made of him, willy-nilly, an idol of at least a day and an hour.

It was nearly one o'clock, and in the local room the reporters were handing in the last pages of their copy, when Murphy limped laboriously through the door. His clothing was disordered; his shirt was torn and bloody; one lip was disreputably swollen, and one eye was closed.

"What's the matter, Murphy?" cried the

sporting editor, who sat near the door, leaping to his feet in alarm. "You haven't been fool enough to get mixed up with a trolley-car, have you?"

"Nothin' the matter," answered Murphy, suppressing a groan. "Just had a little difference of opinion with a gentleman, that's all."

"Who?" exclaimed half a dozen eager reporters.

"O'Hoolihan."

"Not that big, raw-boned policeman on the tenderloin beat?" said the sporting editor.

"Yep."

All stared at Murphy in curious amazement as he fell into a chair.

"What was the trouble?" asked Armstrong.

"I called him a liar."

"Was that all?"

"I may have emphasised it a little," admitted Murphy. "Think I did add a few other names."

He put his red-stained handkerchief tenderly on his lip, and looked as critically as he could with one eye to see if the blood had ceased to flow.

"But what did he do?" asked the religious editor.

"Can't you see, you fool!" retorted Murphy, with acid emphasis.

"I don't mean that. I mean what did you call him a liar for?" explained the religious editor, in some confusion.

"Nothin'."

"But he must have done something to——"

"Look here, you fellows!" cried Murphy, with a slight show of resentment, "I didn't come up here to be cross-examined. I came to tell Mr. Armstrong I want to go home. If you want to know what happened, ask O'Hoolihan. He'll tell you."

Armstrong hastily provided Murphy with an order for a carriage, after having learned from him that the police surgeon had examined his wounds and found none of them to be serious. Then, when Murphy had gone, he despatched a reporter to the police station to find out what had occurred to bring such complete discomfiture to Murphy. Twenty minutes later the reporter, breathless with hurrying and almost speechless with indignation, returned, and related to the group around the city editor's desk the sad, brief story of the disaster.

"You see, O'Hoolihan has been crazy over the roasts he's been getting, and to-night, after

he'd read Drake's article in this morning's—I mean yesterday morning's paper, he came up to headquarters, and tore around, and called the man who wrote the stuff everything he could turn his tongue to. Murphy stood it for quite a while; but finally, when O'Hoolihan had repeated for the twentieth time that the reporter who wrote the article was a liar, a coward, a skunk, and several other things, Murphy got excited, and I guess he did tell O'Hoolihan some things in picturesque and forcible language. Anyway, before the other policemen could interfere, he had beaten Murphy all up and kicked him down a flight of stairs. The big stiff! We've got——"

"Can't we have him arrested?" suggested a young reporter, in wrathful simplicity.

"Naw. You can't do anything to a policeman!" said another.

"Can't we make it so hot for him the police commissioners will have to fire him?" suggested the sporting editor.

"That wouldn't just do," said Armstrong. "He may have a family to support."

Drake, who up to this time had remained silent and thoughtful, now moved toward the door, and took his hat from its hook on the wall.

"There is only one thing to do," he said, quietly, "and that is to go down there and give him as bad a licking as he gave Murphy; and I'm the one to do it. It was my stuff in the paper that caused the trouble."

"But he'd kill you!" was the chorus of objection.

"I guess it wouldn't be as bad as that. At any rate, it's got to be done; and I'm going to try it."

"Well, wait till the paper's off, and we'll all go down there," suggested the city editor; and to this Drake assented.

His coolness half reassured the others; but nevertheless it was with great doubt and foreboding that the entire local staff, as soon as the paper had gone to press, proceeded to the police station. When Drake announced his mission to the night captain, that good-natured officer simply laughed.

"Why, Mr. Drake," he said, "O'Hoolihan 'd make ye look as if ye'd gone through a threshing machine; and besides, I've reprimanded him, and it won't occur again."

"I'm sorry, captain, but I must see O'Hoolihan; and if you won't let me, we'll wait on the sidewalk till he comes out."

"Well, if ye're bound to git a lickin', boy,

come back into the exercisin' room, an' we'll stand by, and see he don't hurt ye too much. But mind, now, I warned ye. He'll sure bate ye up so your own mother won't know ye."

In the exercise-room they found O'Hoolihan, with several other officers of the night reserve. Four of them sat at a confiscated gambling-table engaged in a mild game of seven-up; two others were talking politics, and the rest of them lounged about the room trying to keep awake. The coming of the captain and the solemn reporters was a welcome diversion. When the captain told O'Hoolihan that a boy from the newspaper office had come down to square the account for Murphy, the muscular Irishman uttered a guffaw, and the other policemen joined uproariously in the mirth. But Drake stepped forward, looked O'Hoolihan over, from head to feet, and then said, coolly and distinctly:

"Mister O'Hoolihan,"—with a goading stress on the long-drawn "mister,"—"I want you to know that I am the reporter who wrote that stuff. I am convinced that you lied on the witness-stand in the Therdier trial; that you were bribed, and that you have shown yourself to be a coward and a thief."

There was silence. For a minute O'Hooli-

han stood still, and looked at Drake. Then the full meaning of Drake's words became clear to him, and his red face blazed with anger. He started to reply, but the oaths stuck in his throat, and he was incoherent with swift rage. Suddenly he lunged forward, and his right fist swung out for Drake's head with a force that, had the blow landed, would have ended instantly all his aspirations to chastise policemen. But Drake ducked his head barely in time, and the momentum of the misspent blow carried O'Hoolihan staggering across the room. Bellowing with fury, O'Hoolihan gathered himself to fall upon Drake and annihilate him; but before he could reach the reporter, several policemen had grabbed him, and others had surrounded Drake.

"Look here, young fellow!" said the captain, "ye've insulted O'Hoolihan, and now ye've got to take a lickin' unless he wants to call it off. As he doesn't seem to be very forgivin' just now, we'll see it's all done regular, and ye don't get hurt too bad. Boys, make a ring, and if the kid lasts three minutes we'll call it a round, and make 'em rest three; and then they can go at it again till the young man learns to respect his elders."

In that brief interval of preparation Drake

had time to make a swift review of his athletic achievements; and as he stripped to meet the O'Hoolihan, he marvelled vaguely at the foresight he had displayed in learning certain tricks with his hands, which now had suddenly become the most important things in the world.

They stepped into the ring improvised for them by the circle of policemen and reporters; and O'Hoolihan glowered upon Drake in the manner in which he was accustomed to inspire terror in the heart of every living thing that crossed his beat. O'Hoolihan started the battle with a rush. Drake stepped aside, and as the big fellow went past, landed the first blow squarely on his mouth. The policeman staggered a little; an expression of surprise and pain appeared upon his face; and as he whirled to meet Drake again his huge arms went up more cautiously. Once more he rushed, and again Drake hit him; but this time O'Hoolihan turned quickly, and his big right fist struck Drake's shoulder, dropping him full-length upon the floor. If this mighty blow had struck Drake's head or a vulnerable part of his body, the fight would have ended then and there. As it happened, the blow did not hurt much, and Drake was on his feet in an instant, none the worse for the knockdown.

Again and again O'Hoolihan rushed, and every time Drake ducked or sidestepped to avoid the worst of the vicious swings. At every charge Drake watched his antagonist more closely, and presently the blows he planted on the big man's face and over his heart began to tell. Meanwhile, Drake was not escaping punishment. Already his nose was bleeding, and there was a gash over his right eye. When the police captain stepped between them, and announced that one round was ended, both men were dazed and struggling for breath.

"You're groggy, O'Hoolihan! The kid's lickin' you!" yelled a policeman.

"Naw, he ain't! He's just playin' with the boy!" declared another. O'Hoolihan said nothing.

The *Record* contingent was jubilant. Drake had lasted one round, at any rate, and that was more than even the most hopeful of his friends had dared to expect. They ministered to his wounds, and encouraged him in low tones, and exhorted him, for the honour of the staff, to make an object-lesson of O'Hoolihan. Drake smiled grimly, and abstained from boasting.

The second round began all the policeman's way. He got Drake into a corner, and with a

veritable avalanche of savage blows beat him to the floor.

"It's all over!" exclaimed the sporting editor; and O'Hoolihan thought so too. But almost before the words were spoken, and before the Irishman could place himself again in a defensive posture, Drake leaped to his feet, rushed, for the first time since the fight had started, and landed what the sporting editor later described as "a beautiful left hook" fairly on the policeman's jaw. Instantly he followed it up with a straight right-hand blow that hit O'Hoolihan full in the pit of the stomach. A look of ludicrous and pitiable agony twisted the face of O'Hoolihan; paralysis limbered his knees; the weight of his fists was too much for his arms to bear. As he began to collapse, Drake dealt one more quick jab with all his strength on the policeman's half-open mouth and sent him toppling over.

But O'Hoolihan was not whipped. Before the captain could count ten, he was on his feet and tearing at Drake like a wild beast. For two minutes they fought around the ring, Drake landing blow after blow with apparently no effect, O'Hoolihan marking Drake every time he hit him. The round ended with Drake

badly battered up, but still confident and strong.

The third and last round was a terrific one. The *Record* men lost control of themselves, and danced and yelled in fine frenzy, while the police were sounding the slogan for O'Hoolihan.

"Smash him, O'Hoolihan!"

"Hit him, Drake!"

"You're lettin' a kid lick you, O'Hoolihan!"

"Finish the big lobster, Drake!"

"You're a disgrace to the force, O'Hoolihan!"

Thus cried the excited spectators, while back and forth the battle raged; Drake, agile and keen, watching for an opening; O'Hoolihan stumbling and charging in a fury, aiming sledge-hammer blows in every direction.

"Five to one on Drake!" shouted the sporting editor, forgetting himself; and there was no taker. Both O'Hoolihan's eyes were now closing, and his face was puffed and raw; but he still fought on. Now and then he sent Drake reeling under one of his vicious drives, and finally he struck him on the jaw and sent him to the floor; but the reporter was quickly up again. O'Hoolihan was dazed, and staggered wildly after his fallen but too nimble

foe. Drake saw his chance, and as the Irishman came on, gathered all his powers for the last desperate effort. There was a crack like a pistol-shot; then a slow, soft thud. Drake had landed neatly on the point of his antagonist's jaw, and O'Hoolihan struck the floor squarely on his shoulders.

"One—two—three," counted the captain. O'Hoolihan tried to roll over, but his shoulders stuck to the floor like lead.

"Four—five—six," tolled the solemn numbers. O'Hoolihan fell back into his first position.

"Eight—nine—ten!" O'Hoolihan did not stir. Silently his comrades lifted him on their brawny shoulders and carried him into the police surgeon's room. Drake, in the same instant, was hoisted upon the shoulders of the excited reporters; and yelling, howling, and capering, they bore him out of the police station and up the middle of the streets to the *Record* office. Murphy was avenged; many an old score was wiped out; and Allan Drake was all right, for he had whipped a policeman.

CHAPTER XIII

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
Oh! Wilderness were Paradise enow!

—FITZGERALD'S *Omar.*

"WHAT'S to be done now?" exclaimed Marcia, in a tone half dismay, half amusement.

"We will have to leave the machine here, make our way home as best we can, and send for it later."

It was one of Drake's weekly holidays—a day off; and as was their habit lately, they were spending it exploring the country in her electric runabout.

Midday had found them twenty-five miles away from the city, in the shadow of a sparse little grove of cottonwood, on the banks of Cherry Creek, hungrily interested in the luncheon Marcia had prepared with her own hands for the occasion—a dainty labour she always would perform, in spite of Mollie's protests; and they were now, late in the afternoon, homeward bound. The day was late in September, and the glow of autumn was upon the earth.

In the dry, blue desert of the sky there was not a cloud oasis to be seen; and the sun lumbered like a dusty caravan down the last ethereal leagues of his long day's journey.

The road they had travelled—a true prairie road—stretched straight away before them, smooth, dry, and hard, its dusty scourings crunching with musical monotony beneath the rubber tires. On their left, and far behind them, rushing backward as they sped, were the sad, sallow plains, teeming with silence and undulating drearily to a reluctant meeting with the sky. On the right, down its mile-wide depression, historic Cherry Creek—known of the Indians, its sands heavy with gold too fine to profit panning, its sluggish, meagre flow now innocent of its mad spring ravings—crawled Platte-ward with scarcely a ripple left to tell of its summer's struggle with drought, evaporation, and greedy irrigating ditches. Beyond the creek, northwestward, Denver lay, in the sunlight, like a mirage with three long serpent-things of sulphurous smelter smoke lurking along on its eastern edges. And still beyond this were the mountains, purple and silent, with patches of snow in the rifts of rocks, like a forlorn vanguard holding out for winter's promised reinforcements.

Drake pulled the runabout out of the roadway. Something had gone so radically wrong with it that an hour's hard tinkering had failed to disclose the trouble.

"I don't know what the deuce is the matter," he said at length, surveying the machine in deep, deliberate disgust. "It's most exasperating!"

Marcia could not help smiling at his annoyance.

"Isn't that a ranch-house yonder? Suppose we see what can be done there! We'll ask for a drink of milk."

With a parting glance at the obdurate machine, they walked briskly foward until they came to a branching road that led them to the ranch-house in the valley. As they approached, a sheep-dog gave them a vociferous greeting, and a sunburnt, pleasant-faced woman came to the door.

"We've met with an accident—our automobile has broken down. Is there any way to get a team to take us to town?" Drake asked, doubtfully.

"And may I have a glass of milk, please?" Marcia added, pleasantly, without waiting for an answer to the more momentous question.

"Sure, you can have all the milk you want,"

the woman replied; "but as to the team, you'll have to wait, if you don't mind, until my husband comes home. He won't be long."

Presently she reappeared with the milk in a tin bucket, and gratefully they drank from a polished dipper.

After some time Marcia proposed to Allan that they climb a little hill close by and see the view. They started, followed by the friendly sheep-dog, to whom visitors were evidently rare and welcome. On gaining the top, they looked back with wondering curiosity at the squat, unpainted, lonely home, from which came the clean smell of new bread and the sound of a baby's contented cooing; then beyond, at the sere and melancholy plains.

"A penny for your thoughts!" observed Drake, as he watched the girl gazing dreamily into the distance.

"I was thinking of something—something an old man on Doctor Hammond's ranch once told me. 'I'm a Kentuckian,' said he, 'Miss Marcia—from the Blue Grass country. Once it was God's country, but it isn't any more. It's too rich—too easy, now. *His* country is not a tropic forest, where men decay in idleness; not an island in the southern seas, where nature's bounty discounts labour; not any fair

and plentiful land, where lullabies of wind and sun and shower soothe the energies of man and wrap their ambition in forgetfulness. *No*, this is God's country, right here in Colorado—these dry plains and yon hard mountains!'"

"Your friend's definition of God's country is hardly a Garden of Eden," ventured Drake, with a smile.

"Evidently not, and yet, surely not as lonely."

"Speaking of loneliness, take those people there." Drake indicated with a gesture the little ranch-house below them. "If they're the right sort, they are much happier than the jostling multitude in the city."

"The right sort!" repeated Marcia, interested.

"Yes. People who can live without excitement. I like companionship—yours, Marcia, more than any other; but I thank Heaven I am not so bored with myself that I cannot sit down and be happy alone."

"I understand," Marcia said, sadly, "because I have been alone a great deal in my life, and——"

"But you're different, Marcia," quickly interrupted Drake, laying his hand on hers. "You're the right sort. You don't demand

more than you give. Few women know how to be comrades, and at the same time be women."

In silence they looked over the level land, all inscrutable and brown, waiting sullenly for man to rescue it. At last Marcia withdrew her hand, and said nervously:

"I wish this man would come. It's getting late."

"Here he comes. now."

Drake started forward to meet the ranchman, who, advancing toward them, asked if he might be of any assistance.

Drake explained their predicament.

"We'll get you to town some time to-night," said the stranger, cheerfully; "but where is your automobile? I might be able to find out the trouble. I was a machinist before coming West."

Together they walked to where the machine lay; and it was not long before he had solved the difficulty and put it in running order.

The road for a mile clung to the crest of a ridge, and then dropped into the valley, where, after a little winding, it led to a deserted town. A dozen houses stood there, all empty and forlorn; a store building with its pine boards, loosed and warped by the sun into multiplied parentheses; small dwellings half unroofed and

marked with divers insults of marauding boys; a few thin stumps of dead and denuded trees, isolated ash-heaps, rusty tins, and fragments of forgotten furniture—all getting "back to the earth again," after the manner of every created thing.

"What stories these deserted houses could tell!" exclaimed Marcia, thoughtfully. "How melancholy!"

"And yet, there is another way of looking at it," argued Drake. "The deserted village is typical of the Western spirit that moves men to build, to abandon, to flit away—generally farther and farther westward—and to build again. No doubt this town has served its purpose."

They peeped into one of the dwellings. The sun stared boldly through a big hole in the roof and mocked the dirty desolation of the room.

"You might take this, Allan, for the quiet habitation you think you would like—all alone," suggested Marcia, archly.

"'And Thou beside me singing in the Wilderness,'" quickly returned Drake, looking into her eyes.

Marcia blushed.

The sun by this time was near its setting, and a chill was creeping out of the west.

Presently they came to a spot where a road branched off from that they were travelling.

"I wonder if that isn't a shorter way to town?"

"I don't know," answered Drake. "Shall we try it?"

Marcia steered into the road, and rapidly they sped down the long, smooth incline towards the creek. At the end of a two-mile run they discovered, to their chagrin, that there was no bridge.

"It's only a ford!" said Drake.

"How provoking!" Marcia, plainly disturbed, looked at the creek, then at Drake.

"It isn't deep, but it might as well be a river," continued Drake, peering into the stream. "We can't get across!"

"What shall we do?" She turned and looked back over the way they had come.

"It's a long way around to the bridge we crossed this morning, and you're tired, Marcia." Drake reflected; then suddenly he cried: "What an idiot I am! Jump out and wait here for me; I'll be back presently."

Before Marcia could realise that she was on the ground, Drake had turned the machine around, flying back to the deserted village. After a few minutes, she sat down and calmly

proceeded to take off her shoes and stockings. Her feet were drawn up beneath her skirt when Drake returned with several good-sized planks on the back of the machine.

"What on earth are you up to?" he inquired.

"I am going to wade," she announced, coolly.

"Wade? Nonsense! I'll carry you." And Drake directed towards Marcia a questioning, half-merry look, between a challenge and a plea.

"Allan!" she cried, colouring deeply.

Drake plunged into the water, which seemed deliciously cool and refreshing after the dusty ride, and set to work laying the planks across the stream. With considerable difficulty he managed to run the machine over in safety.

"Come, Marcia! Your turn, now!"

"Sir!" she cried, haughtily, with seeming indignation. "It's not deep. You keep ahead and look for the shallow places."

Drake laughed, and reluctantly turned around.

"Now, eyes front!" commanded Marcia, as she skipped lightly down the bank. "You're only a soldier, and must obey orders, if you know how." But he was also a man, and as she stepped into the water with a gasping little

shriek, he boldly picked her up, half-struggling, and carried her across.

"Allan, I told you not to," she protested, not very severely; though her cheeks were aflame as he placed her on the opposite bank, where she squatted in a heap.

"Honestly," said he, with averted face, "it was much deeper than you have any idea. You could not have waded it."

Whether she believed him or not, the fact that he was wet through distressed her. "I think you had better see if there is anything further the matter with our chariot," she said, sweetly. "Please."

On his honour as a gentleman he did as he was bidden. Marcia was soon ready, and presently gaining the main road, they were once more on the final run for home.

"Anyhow, that was better than going around, wasn't it?" asked Drake, a trifle anxious as to her attitude towards him.

"It wasn't very nice of you when you knew I preferred——" She broke off abruptly in a little laugh.

Drake looked at her covetously, so beautiful and happy was she in the orange after-glow of the sun's warm setting.

"If you would only——"

Marcia interrupted him with a sharp cry of alarm. "What's that?"

Drake was startled, and listened.

From far behind them came a low, rumbling, whirring, throbbing sound that every second grew louder and louder. Quickly turning, he saw the great gleaming bull's-eye lights, ever broadening, piercing the darkness, and approaching with terrific speed. The road was narrow.

"Open her up! Push her!" he cried, excitedly. "An automobile is coming at a fearful rate! We must get out of his way!"

Marcia turned on the power, and they flew ahead. Again Drake looked anxiously behind. The searching eyeballs of fire were almost upon them. "Faster, Marcia! Faster!"

On they rushed. The road was widening. Instantly Drake ordered Marcia to steer clear over to one side.

She obeyed, bringing the machine to a standstill; and almost instantly, with a deafening roar, a huge automobile, barely missing them, whizzed past; and covering them with dust and dirt, disappeared, showing, as it vanished in the gloom, a tiny red light like a spark.

"By Jove! That was a close shave!" cried Drake, angrily. "I'd like to take a shot at

that fellow. It's d——n outrageous for a man to drive like that!"

Marcia sat strangely still. At last she spoke, in a strained, broken voice.

"It was Henry! Since the trial, Allan, he spends most of his spare time recklessly, madly tearing over the prairie. It seems to give him fierce enjoyment—rest." She sighed deeply. "Oh, look yonder—at the lights coming up in the city! Denver is counting the beads of her rosary."

CHAPTER XIV

Alas! how is't with you,
That you do bend your eye on vacancy
And with the incorporal air do hold discourse?
—SHAKESPEARE.

FROM the day of his undertaking to defend Therdier, to the hour when he saw him free, Henry Woolford's nerves were strained to their utmost tension by the ordeals he contrived for them. All his life he had been a tireless worker. His was the kind of nature that, if food be not provided, will feed upon itself. Work was play to him; play he would ever turn to work. Such energy of spirit as was his, unless approved and supported by the physical powers, meets an early limitation. Woolford had not only will but physique also; and he could and would do things that would have wrecked the nerves of any man less triumphantly equipped. No excess of effort ever had exhausted him; and often after days of labour he had spent whole nights toiling at his desk. With his habits thus fixed it was not strange that, on taking up the strangling cases, he had doubled and even trebled his exertions. More than ever then he

was sought after by men who were in peril of their liberties or their lives. It seemed that no criminal action of importance could go to trial without Henry Woolford's appearing as counsel, or at least as advisory counsel, for the defence. And to every subject that came before him he gave the same degree of thought that he bestowed upon the defence of Therdier. In his office he denied himself to all visitors except his clients. He laboured there from morning until night; and at home, save on rare occasions, he went to his study directly from the dinner-table, and sat at his desk or paced the floor till dawn. Still, contrary to all Marcia's fears for him, he did not break down before the trial was successfully concluded.

In the earlier days of his connection with the strangling cases, Woolford had permitted Marcia to help him, had regularly sought her aid; but gradually, as the time for the trial drew near, he became secretive and reserved. This habit of concealment grew until he came at last to spend his evenings in his study all alone, almost oblivious, it seemed, to Marcia's presence in the house. Before that time, however impatient and severe he may have been with others, she had never known him to be aught but kind to her; but in the few later

months before the trial, he hurt her often with his neglect, or spoke harshly to her when he noticed her at all. And strange moods came over him which Marcia could not understand.

All this time, from the very day he was retained in the strangling cases, Woolford had experienced a mental exaltation which, it seemed, goaded him on to effort, lifted him out of himself, transformed every desire and every tendency of his being into one concrete, absorbing purpose—to surpass himself in the defence of Therdier. That ambition realised, the bench and the bar amazed, the city ringing with his name, he had gone home to bed, indifferent to all things.

For days he was ill. Marcia gave him the most loving care, and she was delighted beyond measure to find him, in his recovering, much the same dear brother who had all her life, till lately, been so near to her. He was buoyant, communicative, and gentle now, and, save for an indefinable tinge of sadness in his demeanour, and an occasional lapsing into sober silence, he was himself again. This change, after the months of anxiety she had experienced, was to Marcia tonic and sweet. They had many happy evenings together—happy in their own special way, sometimes working over Henry's

briefs, sometimes reading to each other out of the books they loved, forgetful always of other people in the world—of all save one, the image of whose face would now and then shape into Marcia's sight. These were precious nights, remembered in the after-time with many a pang.

There came an evening when at dinner Henry was a little more restrained than was his wont in these later pleasant times. He did not enter into the spirit of Marcia's blithe and careless talk; and when he had finished dining, he went into the library, drew an easy-chair before the fire—for autumn's touch was in the air—and was soon absorbed in a book. Marcia followed him presently, and stood looking at him with tender solicitude growing in her eyes. After hesitating a minute she stole up behind him and leaned over his shoulder; her two warm, round arms encircled his neck, and very gently took the book out of his hands.

"Brother, dear, you look worried and tired to-night," she said, with earnest insistence. "I'm going to bathe your head, and then I'll read to you. May I?"

Marcia turned the book in her hand and glanced at the author's name. It was a treatise by Krafft-Ebbing. At once a shudder went through her; and Henry saw a swift horror

drive the colour from the face that lay upon his shoulder, close to his own. He studied her in silence.

"Henry, I don't know why—I suppose I am very foolish; but, brother," she faltered, "I don't like to see you reading this. You've tried to hide the book from me—yes, you have, dear!"

Marcia burst into tears.

"There, there, little one!" said Henry, taking her in his arms. "Don't worry over that. Don't, Marcia!"

He wiped away her tears. For a long time he sat in silence, with one arm around his sister, and the other supporting his bowed head, while he looked grimly into the fire. Marcia's sobs were slowly hushed; but she lay quite still and did not speak.

The fire in the grate burned low. The old clock in the hall ticked off the ponderous minutes. At length Woolford spoke in low tones such as he seldom used—tones like some of those in the middle register of a violoncello, only far clearer and sweeter.

"Sister, dear," he said, "no mortal can realise how I love you. We are all that are left in the world of our family, you and I. So far, little one, our lives have been sunshine—mostly sunshine, haven't they?"

Marcia nodded in appreciative acquiescence.

"You and I have been happy together," Henry continued. "Our days have been peaceful—as peaceful as anybody's days can be. We have loved each other, and love each other still, and not for many years has sorrow stolen beneath our roof. But, Marcia, none of us can realise perfect happiness in this world—even what we call happiness—until we have learned how to suffer. Oh, the suffering there is in life! Always suffering; but the more terrible the storm, the more satisfying is the calm that follows. That is some consolation."

He paused, for Marcia trembled in his embrace; and he turned his face away from her that she might not see the anguish he knew was depicted there.

"Don't fear, little one," he said, and his voice shook in spite of all his self-control. "Don't fear. Henry's arm is around you. You have always been so courageous—you *will* be, won't you, dear? I have hurt you—I must hurt you more; and the thought of it is tearing at my heart. But, Marcia, I must tell you—I must, because you know we are all that is left, you and I; and if anything should happen to—to one of us——"

Marcia's breath came fast, and her eyes

opened wide from the vague fear her brother's words inspired. Then she put her arms around his neck, and whispered:

"Go on, Henry. What is it?"

"I've thought it all out these last two weeks, sister—thought it all out, as nearly as I can. There is only one thing for us to do, and that is, to go hand in hand down through the fury of the storm,—down through the fury of the storm,—if there is to be one; hand in hand up to the sunlight, on the other side, if there is to be any—other—side."

He spoke more firmly by this time, regaining his self-poise as he went on, his voice—that marvellous voice—gathering up more sweetness with every word.

"Now, don't worry, Marcia; everything will come out all right in the end. We'll take a long journey, for I must have rest. I did not realise what these moods meant. They come on me when least expected. Doctor Hammond says they are only temporary; but, my dear, you must know—be prepared for them."

He rested his head upon Marcia's cheek; and a sob—a man's unwilling, tearless sob—shook his iron frame. Marcia caressed him; seeing his distress, all her faculties had come back to her; and she was calm and patient.

"Why, Henry," she said, coaxingly, "you have thought and worked so hard that you have worried yourself into a fever. You exaggerate it all! We'll take a long rest, as you suggest, and Doctor Hammond shall make you well again. Now, stop, and let us talk of something else."

Woolford lifted his head again. His face was grey and lifeless, like the ancient print of a face in volcanic ash. For a little while he stared into the fire, and the solemn, remorseless ticking of the old clock in the hall was the only sound. Then, with the tightening of his blue lips, he said:

"No, it is for the best. I must tell you, little sweetheart, for your sake—for mine."

Again his head sank low, and again the terrible sobs ravaged him—sobs like monstrous tidal waves of emotion sweeping over him.

"Don't talk that way, brother," pleaded the girl, frightened; but holding herself together with an effort of the will, tears streaming down her cheeks. "You are nervous, dear. Let me—please let me make you something hot to drink, and then go to bed and sleep. You'll be better to-morrow, I know you will."

She stroked his hair and begged him to cease his troubling. At last he checked her, raised

his head, took her arms from around his neck and held her at arms' length away from him, looking at her fixedly, as if measuring her strength to receive the blow. His muscles became rigid, his mouth opened stiffly, his eyes were round and starting from their deep recesses, and his voice was hollow, still, and dead.

"Marcia!"

"Henry!"

There was a world of pathos and bravery in the way she spoke the name. It seemed to relieve him, yet determined his action. Very gently he led her to the sofa and seated her there. Tenderly, he wound his arm around her waist, then turned his head away from her.

"Marcia, you must understand. I can keep it to myself no longer—I feel—I know—I am going—mad!"

A little gasp of horror came from the girl's lips, and unconsciously she drew away from her brother, recoiling from his touch; and as he released his hold upon her, she fell backward, but caught herself with one groping hand upon the floor; and half sat, half lay there, limp and stricken. For a minute her eyes, fastened on Henry's face, were filled with helplessness and awe. The clock ticked again; a tiny cinder in the grate fell with a mighty crash, like a tem-

ple coming down in ruin; then the banished blood mounted to her head again. A flush of shame at her cowardice spread over her face as she gazed at the beloved head, the well-remembered lips, the cheeks she used to kiss, the thin blond hair upon his pallid forehead.

"Henry!" She cried the name again; but now it was a sob—a wave of love from her heart —love finding its voice again. Slowly she raised herself from the floor, her streaming eyes intent upon her brother's face, but filling now with the lights of pity and love.

"Henry, dear!"

She crept nearer to him, reached out her arms, stretched her fingers, hungrily, and touched his face; then, weeping, she threw herself into his arms and put her own around his neck. Henry sat quite still, and did not bow his head, but let the tears roll down his cheeks upon her shining hair. They remained a long time thus—brother and sister—Marcia, soothing, caressing, finally minimising, ridiculing his fears. Presently he was calm; and she began to outline plans for the future. He must give up his practice; she would take him for a long sea voyage. They would go to places and see things; would hear music in old, old cities; would see the Southern Cross above their heads;

would watch the lights in the Mediterranean; would drop their troubles—all their troubles—into the Ocean's deep and leave them there.

Just as the dawn touched the curtains of her bedroom windows, Marcia went to sleep after one final prayer that Henry might be restored to health; and the thought that lay last in her consciousness was this: she vowed that henceforth she would devote her life to her brother.

CHAPTER XV

Wind of the North,
Wind of the Norland snows,
Wind of the winnowed skies, and sharp, clear stars—
Blow clear and keen across the naked hills,
And crisp the lowland pools with crystal films,
And blur the casement square with glittering ice,
But go not near my love.

—Charles Henry Luders.

It was a Sunday late in November. An end of golden days had come, and the predictions of an early winter were, it was plain, near to their fulfilling. The city had gone to sleep beneath sedate stars; and had awakened to find windows muffled with wet snow, and the north wind clamouring at doors.

Drake slept late. It was full noon when first he heard, in sleepy curiosity, the unfamiliar howling of the blast. He listened, then arose, and went to the window. As he raised the curtain, an involuntary "Whew!" escaped him. Through the flaked window-pane, he saw a ragged vista of white housetops, swirls of smoke and snow pirouetting over them; and far beyond, the mountains, huddling low in the storm,

fresh snow sharpening the outlines of their peaks.

"Denver always wears a look of pained surprise when the first storm hits her," Drake said to himself. "She's a spoiled child, Denver is, and gets so used to being petted by the sunshine that she forgets there's such a thing as winter's sudden spank."

His mother had breakfast ready for him when he went downstairs. The two morning papers lay beside his plate. He picked up one, but dropped it reluctantly. It was a pet rule of his never to look at a newspaper on the one day in every week that was his own.

Drake finished breakfast at his leisure, telling his mother the while, as his habit was, of all the doings in the office the day and night before; and touched up the various incidents in a way that brought a gleam into her eyes and set her to laughing, and laughing again long after he had finished the stories and had left the house.

"I sent a note to Miss Woolford that I'd come up this afternoon," Allan said at the expiration of an hour. "I'll go now, I think. I may not be home to dinner, but I'll not be out late, mother," he added, then buttoned his heavy ulster, and went out into the storm.

The electric motors toiled and grumbled in the snow, and Drake had plenty of time for thought while he journeyed up the grades that tempestuous afternoon. He now found himself worrying somewhat vaguely about Marcia, and fancied that she had borne a changed demeanour lately. One evening he had found her in tears and almost hysterical. She had refused to confide in him, but had responded a little to the efforts he had exerted to amuse her. Since that night, he had seen her several times—five times, he counted them—and had noticed in her manner an occasional abstraction that disturbed him. She was annoyed, pained, troubled by something, he was sure, and as that conviction grew upon him, he began to feel an odd emotion that was anger and pity mingled—anger, at the cause of her suffering, pity for her—for his Marcia. This thought of ownership checked him at first; but the more he considered it, the more natural and right it seemed. And, in that instant, all the dislike for Henry that had lain long latent in his bosom, grew into a real and ugly thing. Was Henry causing this distress in Marcia's heart? Was there something wrong? The lawyer was not well, he knew—had not been in good health since the trial, Marcia had said. Was he venting his ill-humour

upon her? Then Drake reflected more soberly, and decided that he was trying to guess too much. He knew that Henry loved and cared for her tenderly. If he were ill, it was natural enough that she should be grieving. And yet—and yet there was that inchoate suspicion in his mind, and he could not quite dismiss it.

The week that followed that awful night had indeed been one of suffering for Marcia—a week of suffering, we say, as if with our petty forms of speech we could measure grief like the phases of the moon, the length of days, the progress of the seasons.

Pain is the positive, happiness the negative, in our lives. The most pitiful thing of all is that the heart once stricken, can never be itself again. Comfort, acquiescence, love's fulfilment, all may be ours in the later years; but still there is the memory of the hurt, the cicatrice, the haunting fear. The kiss on the burning scar is sweet; but there is the scar.

The week passed somehow, and before it went, Marcia had become aware that Henry was on the eve of another attack. She had learned that when he worked with such dogged and feverish intensity, as now marked his daily occupation, without mercy upon himself, or upon

others, his soul was in turmoil. His practice, at this time, demanded no such extraordinary efforts. The case that was set for trial, at an early date, and in which, as counsel for the defence, he was associated with two other lawyers, did not require unusual acumen or surpassing labour; yet, in his daily conferences with his colleagues, he amazed these learned men by the depth of thought and the lambencies of imagination with which he would explain details of evidence that seemed, to their more practical and plodding minds, trivial and inconsequential. Nevertheless, they saw nothing unnatural in his conduct, but accepted all his utterances, however extraordinary, as the characteristic expressions of Henry Woolford—Woolford, the enigma they had long since given up.

Not so, with Marcia. She understood this rhapsody, particularly when Henry came home of an evening, tired and morose, but yet sufficiently aggressive to be contemptuous. Day by day, all that week, Woolford had grown steadily more irritable. Marcia occasionally saw him at meals, but he was always sullen, gruff, and taciturn, proof against her brave and apprehensive attempts to converse with him.

Marcia came to the door while Drake was shaking the snow from his shoulders.

"I saw you coming," she said, greeting him. "Hurry in! You'll freeze!"

"It isn't that bad; but it's going to be cold," he answered, lightly. "This is not a blizzard, but it's one of a blizzard's brood, out for a gambol."

Drake, going over to the window seat, where she had been sitting, picked up a small volume bound in wine-coloured leather.

"Omar! Isn't this a trying kind of a day for Omar? Red roses and grey days don't go well together, Marcia."

"But I couldn't think of anything else I wanted to read," she explained. "And even Omar doesn't help me to-day. There isn't a word of encouragement—not a word of hope in all he says."

"Hope! Perhaps not; yet he speaks the truth. The lives of ninety-nine persons out of every hundred teach a more melancholy lesson than you find in the Rubaiyat, or in any other book, for that matter."

"But, at any rate," declared Marcia, "Omar was resigned to the inevitable, and had quit worrying about it."

"Yes," assented Drake. "And only now and then, among the millions will you find a man who has found out what fun it is to

laugh at misfortune and death—as Stevenson laughed."

"How many people are resigned to anything —even to happiness?" asked Marcia.

"True," he allowed. "They are like flies, so busy struggling to get out of the pot that they never stop to ascertain whether it's filled with molasses or with vinegar."

"There are just two quatrains that do not make me feel the worse for reading them," Marcia went on, a little later.

"I can guess them."

"Try."

"'With me along the Strip of Herbage Strown'?"

"Yes, that is one," interrupted Marcia; "the other is the one you would not let me finish quoting, that day when we peeped into the deserted house."

Drake leaned forward and looked significantly into her eyes. Marcia bowed her head and was silent. Then he continued:

"Omar always responds to me. He has a mood for every mood of mine—sad or gay; studious or indifferent. He has a bully way of telling you that everything the world calls good does not really amount to beans."

"Ah! But does he offer you anything in its place?" persisted Marcia.

"No, unless it be courage to realise that there is no absolute happiness."

"But there is, Allan, somewhere. I know there is."

Marcia leaned her chin on her hand and looked out into the storm. The naked little limbs of a shrub, punished by the wind, clawed at the window-pane, scrawling its story on the sheet of clinging snow. Drake watched it, then he went and stood by her chair, and dared to fondle a lock of her hair that played truant upon her forehead. Marcia sat quite still.

"You're in a solemn mood again to-day, Marcia," he began. "Something is troubling you. Can't you tell me about it?"

"There is nothing to tell," she responded, continuing to stare out of the window. "I'm afraid something is going to happen to Henry," she ventured to say.

"You only imagine that," protested Drake.

"No, no! He is upstairs in his study now. Since yesterday he has not left the case he is working on. I've carried all his meals to his room. He will not touch a thing but bread and coffee. He worked at his desk all night, except

a couple of hours just before daylight, when he walked the floor. He——"

"And you lay awake and worried!" Drake cried, indignantly.

"I couldn't sleep, Allan, indeed I couldn't."

"Can't you induce him to go away for a long rest?" suggested Drake.

"He says he will. It's all planned for him—for us to go. But he keeps putting it off."

"But you can influence him to do anything."

She shook her head sadly.

"I always could till now," she said. "He will not listen to me. Lately when I have talked to him, I have suddenly discovered that he was thinking of something else, and not hearing a word I said. And several times he has been impatient with me, and—and that almost breaks my heart."

She was crying softly now, hiding her face in her hands. Drake was silent, the strange anger in his heart storming up to his lips; but he restrained himself and tried to coax her back to peace.

"He thinks a great deal of you, Marcia, you know that."

"I know he does; but——"

She raised her head, parted her lips to speak, but they quivered, and Drake saw the tears dry-

ing on her cheeks. At last she lifted her hands and clasped one of his in both her own.

"There are things I cannot tell you, Allan," she said, piteously. "But——" She stopped suddenly, and whispered quickly: "Hush! Here he comes!"

Woolford's steps were heard rapidly descending the stairs. He came hurriedly into the room.

"I cannot find that treatise!" he exclaimed, irritably; and noticing Drake, shook hands with him, saying absently, without any leading up to the subject, evidently what was on his mind:

"Oh, these lawyers are nothing but schoolboys! They know law—that's all they do know. Law is a small part of a successful lawyer's equipment. Men! Men! Men! Why don't they study men! What do they know of men? Of me?" He laughed bitterly, and departed as quickly as he had come, forgetting all about the missing book.

Drake was shocked; but determined not to show his feelings before Marcia, and abruptly changed the subject.

The afternoon had spent itself, and the night was near. After one of the long silences that often sweeten companionship, Marcia leaped to

her feet, and swept her hand bewilderingly across her eyes.

"I suppose it is foolish of me," she remarked, with a slight tremor in her voice. "Here I've spoilt our afternoon. It's Mollie's day out. I'm going to cook you something nice to eat, and then, sir, you're going to talk to me. 'And don't you go till I come,'" she quoted.

"'And don't you make any noise,'" he continued.

With that she tripped toward the kitchen, smiling back at him as she went. Drake stood staring after her, half amazed, and wholly captivated by this swift transition. What a plucky little woman. The weaker sex! Weak, perhaps, where man is obviously strong; but how brave and ready to set a shining face against the world, to dissemble sorrow, to rise above defeat, to conceal humiliation, to smile while her heart is breaking! Drake thought Marcia's fears for Henry were exaggerated, but he knew they were genuine; and to see her dash them away with her tears, and in a minute to be her cheeriest self again, filled him with admiration.

A few minutes later Marcia stood in the doorway, lifting the draperies above her head. Her face was aglow, and her hair seemed to have stolen all the richest lights from the fire she had

been bending over. She wore one of Mollie's white aprons, and made a radiant picture against the dark background of the hallway.

"Come, and let me see if I have driven your appetite away. It's just a snack I've got for you, as Mollie says, but don't you dare to complain!"

In the shadows of the hall, while he followed her merry leading, Drake came to a sudden resolution. He would tell her, that very evening—tell her how much he loved her.

After tea, and while Marcia arranged things in the dining-room, so they would not shock Mollie's well-regulated sensibilities, Drake returned to the library, under orders, and heaped the grate fire with piñon.

"Make it bright!" commanded Marcia; and he succeeded so well that, by the time she came in, the room was yellow with the light, and fragrant as a forest of pines.

"Let's not have any other light, just yet," Drake suggested. "Let's sit by the fire and talk; or, play something for me, won't you?"

"Yes," answered Marcia, joyously. "This will be a night in a lifetime. We'll try to forget everybody except ourselves, for a little while."

Drake drew forward a large chair before the fire for himself, as she took a seat before the piano. Her fingers wandered over the keys, softly, slowly, then louder, and more quickly as if in unison with her varying thoughts. Drake listening, as in a dream, thought he had never before heard her play with so much feeling. Finally, all his finer nature was aroused, when in a dulcet, contralto voice, she sang Nevin's "When the Land was White with Moonlight."

When the notes had died away, he rose and offered her the chair he was occupying; but she playfully declined it and made him keep it for himself. Then laughing, she plumped down on a hassock, and leaning forward gazed into the fire.

"We're closer now than we have ever been, Marcia," Drake intimated, softly.

"Yes, you are having your own way for once," she admitted, smiling up into his face. "Now tell me something—something about yourself."

"Past, present, or future?" he asked, half seriously.

"All — anything — everything," demanded Marcia, all attention.

"Well, to begin with," Drake replied, slowly, "there is nothing in the past that would be in-

teresting to you." When he spoke again, after a short silence, there was a wistful look in his eyes. "I used to build air castles. I wanted to be rich, and powerful; but the years have taught me things. I still have ambitions, but I am not deceived, and can forget them, if need be. All are futile and unworthy, unless they can bring one happiness. And, Marcia, I have my notions of happiness."

Silence fell upon them again.

The wind was up, charging with sullen, surly menace in its tones. As Drake and Marcia listened, there came a sound of distant-seeming footsteps, tramping back and forth upon the floor. Marcia heard it, and raised her head to listen. Drake did not notice the sound, or see the shadow that crossed her averted face. He leaned forward and put one arm around her shoulders with a gentle pressure. She turned and looked into his face, frankly, fondly, unabashed. In that long look into each other's eyes, their souls met, mingled, understood.

"Sweetheart," he declared, tenderly; and the word—the first endearing one he had yet spoken to her—sent a thrill through every nerve of the girl, "you have taught me a new life—a new hope. I'm willing to let the world have all the

other things it calls precious. I have discovered how to be happy. I want you, Marcia. Don't you think we could be happy together?"

Marcia had gazed at him, mute and transfixed, while he spoke these last words. Suddenly there came upon her face an expression of fear and pain, so pitiable that he felt his heart check as if it were about to stop its beating. She reached out her hands towards him, and a rising sob shook her. When Allan clasped her in his arms, she did not resist; but nestled there; and wept.

After a time, she listened to his pleading.

"Oh, Allan! You do not know!" she cried. "You—do—not know! It cannot be—no, no, Allan, I—can't!"

Drake, amazed, looked down at her distracted countenance.

"I thought—don't you love me?" he managed to say.

"How can you ask me that?" she replied, reproachfully.

"Then why not? I want you, Marcia."

"Allan, if you care for me, do not ask me why." She struggled out of his embrace and got upon her feet. "No, no! Don't ask me why!" she repeated, the frightened look again in her eyes. "Go, Allan! Please go, before I—— Can't you

see how I am suffering? Go! If you love me, go!"

"But Marcia!" Drake pleaded. "You are not driving me away—for ever!"

"No! You may come to see me—some time—yes, yes, you must—but don't punish me any more now—Allan—dear!"

For an instant longer, they stood apart, gazing at each other. Then, with a cry, Marcia threw herself into his arms.

"I love you, Allan! I love you!"

For one sweet, brief minute, she clung to him; then bravely, almost imperiously she drew away again, stood erect, her eyes shining, and reaching out her hand, led him unresisting to the door. He passed out without a word.

Drake did not see the door flung open again, or Marcia come out, gaze at his retreating figure, stretch her hands toward him, and cry out: "Allan! Henry! God help me!" Then returning to the deserted library, she fell on her knees, buried her head in the armchair before the ashes of the fire, and sobbed herself to sleep.

All that night the restless footsteps beat incessantly upon the floor of Henry Woolford's chamber.

CHAPTER XVI

Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well,
When our deep plots do pall.

—SHAKESPEARE.

THE Patriarch Murphy was impatiently waiting in the Quarter, walking nervously to and fro in front of a restaurant where "Open all Night" is a sign superfluous; where business languishes by day; and where the first sputter of the electric lamps is the signal for the real awakening. For the activities of the Quarter are nocturnal, chiefly because the habits and the prejudices of the contributing outside world have made them so.

It had been one of Murphy's lazy afternoons. A ten-dollar bill rolled up in a little ball, in the left-hand pocket of his trousers, was all that remained of his preceding week's salary; and all that day, whenever his hand had sought his pocket, and touched it, he had been moved to make just one more experiment with his favourite roulette system. Finally he yielded and walked out of the office with the purpose to play five dollars of the money, and if he lost, to play

no more. At the first corner, he stopped and debated with his doubts.

"I know as sure as fate that if I begin, I'll not quit till the whole ten is gone," he mused to himself.

He wavered; but the clicking of the ball on the roulette wheel was in his ears, and beckoned him on. "It's about my time to win," he went on, "and——"

Thus Murphy permitted himself to be an arena of these combating impulses; but all the while he was walking more and more rapidly in the direction of Therdier's.

He entered. At nearly every table men were playing, but there chanced to be no players around Murphy's favourite wheel. A white-haired old Frenchman, who had been sitting idly before Murphy's entrance, now stood, and set the ball to rolling.

"Hello, Pete!" cried Murphy. He had known old Pete for a long time, and always chose his table, when he came to Therdier's to play.

Pete nodded, and did not speak.

Murphy played with great care, according to the system he had devised. It was not long before all the chips were gone. He stood silently watching the little marble spinning enticingly,

dropping persuasively into the numbered compartments of the wheel, holding possibilities of good luck in every stop it made.

He again thrust his hand into his pocket, held it there for a minute, and then, with reckless disregard of all his vows, tossed the remainder of his money upon the table. With an impassive face, Pete counted out the chips, and once more spun the white ball. It rolled—rolled; lost its impetus; dropped upon the edges of the pockets; rattled over several of them; bounded into one and out again; and finally settled with a sharp click. Murphy remained still, in a submissive, disappointed silence.

"I'd give it up, young man," said Pete, with averted eyes and in a low tone.

Murphy looked up at him, and laughed.

"Oh, I've been just a bit unlucky lately," he contended. "My turn 'll come."

"That's what I thought when I was a young fellow like you." Pete spoke in subdued, remorseful tone. "And I didn't stop. I lost everything. Business, wife, all, for that. You see what I am now! My hair is white before its time—I haven't a friend on earth."

He twirled the ball twice without speaking. It was not an invitation to Murphy—simply habit, and a reminder to others that the game

was still open. Presently he looked up. There was no one near them. He glanced swiftly around the room, and then leaned over, as if to pick up something from the table.

"Would it help you very much if you could get on the trail of the strangler?" Pete asked, with some concern in the question.

Murphy bent forward to look steadily into the unflinching eyes. "Help me!" he repeated. "Great Cæsar, man, it would make me! Why, Pete, I'd——"

"Sh! Not so loud!" cautioned Pete, making a sudden great ado of whirling the ball. Murphy, though burning with eagerness, restrained himself. The gambler reflected a few moments, and then very quietly said: "Come around here later to-night. I'll be through with my table then. Meet me outside—we'll go some place, and I'll give you the particulars."

Murphy leaped to his feet, overturning a chair in his eagerness. The ball rolled again with its monotonous whirr, as he hurriedly left the house.

"To find the strangler!" he muttered, and grew more and more excited. In swift review, there flitted through his mind all the incidents of that night a year ago, when the city editor, at his suggestion, had given the case to Drake.

He had not succeeded either. Drake was a good fellow—he liked him better than any one else. They had been friends from the start; and many good turns of his were not forgotten. Nevertheless, he longed to vindicate himself—to make good with his paper.

The restaurant where Murphy and old Pete met a little later, was up to the requirements of the Quarter, and no more. Daylight never could have found its way through the dirty windows, and gaslight, accustomed as it is to suffocating air and noisome odours, was almost strangled there; but struggled on in dim discouragement. The room was small and unventilated, with a black haze hanging to the ceiling and the smell of the kitchen paramount.

"Now, Pete; tell me who he is?" asked Murphy, unable to check his impatience.

The gambler ordered something to drink, before replying; even waited for them to be served.

"Look here, Murphy; go slow. I asked you if it would help you if I gave you some inside information. Didn't say I could."

Murphy's eyes glistened with anger. He spoke in a harsh voice. "What's this you're telling me? I thought you——"

The gambler raised his hand warningly and

glanced in alarm around the room. "Not so loud!" he murmured.

Murphy regained his composure. He perceived that the man knew something, and he must let him tell it his own way. Pete again called the waiter, ordered more to drink and something to eat; then, he leaned crouchingly across the table, and indicated with a slight movement of the hand the house across the street.

Murphy instinctively followed the man's motion, and glanced at the gambling-house.

"There's trouble over there," Pete whispered.

Murphy started. "At Therdier's? What the devil is up there?"

The old gambler was thoroughly enjoying the situation. His secret gave him an importance that he had not felt for years. He smiled at the earnestness in the other's face, as he asked:

"You don't mean Jacques and Richard are at odds again?"

Pete shrugged his shoulders. "Yes; and they are all jumping on Richard, and——"

"But he has been acquitted," interrupted Murphy.

"All the same, a lot of them believe that he did it," he maintained; and then with a more

knowing air said: "It cost Jacques a pile of money. And there has never been much love wasted between them. Richard has been hinting some ugly things."

"Go on, man; hinting at what?" Murphy's patience was fast getting exhausted.

"Well, last night," Pete went on slowly, not in the least hurried by the anxiety of his questioner, "Richard came into the club. He was drunk and inclined to be quarrelsome; and as was his wont, blustering and bragging about what he was going to do. Presently Jacques arrived, and fastened those steely eyes of his on his brother. On perceiving his condition, he very quietly ordered him to leave. Richard refused; angry words followed; all play at the tables ceased. Both men always go armed, and it looked like trouble. Jacques said something in a low tone; but it was impossible to hear what it was. Richard was instantly cowed and slunk away like a whipped cur. I, alone, distinctly heard his parting words:

"'If you want to know who the man is, ask Elise.'"

"Elise!" Murphy stared in perplexity.

"Jacques turned pale," Pete continued; "and never answered a word. There were none but Americans playing, and the croupiers were not

close enough to hear. The incident was soon forgotten. It was a big night, and Jacques was very busy. He did not get away to go upstairs till very late; then there was an awful scene in their apartments, and——"

"How did you know that?"

"It leaked out through the woman, Christine —Elise's maid. She told her husband; he told me." He paused and looked around apprehensively, and then hurried on to say, "Jacques informed Elise what Richard had said, and insisted on knowing whom he meant. She denied everything—accused Richard of always having been her enemy, and went so far as to say that she believed he would have charged her with having killed his wife, were it not for the other murders. Jacques could find out nothing. Elise was immovable, and at last he left the room in a rage."

"Does this Christine know who the man is?" Murphy asked, in an unguarded tone, that caused Pete again to caution him.

"I think not. She says Elise has been acting strangely, of late; is overwrought, nervous, excitable, sees more people than formerly, and hates to be alone."

Pete told all this with a positiveness that convinced the listener of the man's sincerity.

Whether or not they were illusions, at least he had given a clue. For another half-hour Murphy plied him with questions; but was unable to elicit anything of importance.

"Now that's all I know!" the old gambler concluded, in a tone of finality. "I saw you were in hard luck, and wanted to do you a good turn. But you'd better go slow before you do anything. You must not use my name. I'd lose my job, if nothing worse happened. You'll promise that, won't you?"

"Oh, I'll keep you out of it, all right," Murphy promised, readily enough, for the information was a distinct disappointment. Once more he had been over-confident.

He rose from his seat at the table, where his supper remained untasted, heartily thanked Pete, and left. The restaurant by this time was thronged with people, all clamouring to be waited on, and Murphy was forced to push his way through the crowd. He walked the distance of a block, crossed to the other side of the street, and hastened to Therdier's.

The servant was some time in bringing an answer from Elise; and Murphy was wondering how he should approach her. He realised perfectly that he was dealing with a clever woman—one skilled in all the artifices of her sex. How

could he force her to reveal matters necessarily of such vital interest to her to conceal? No plan, or clever stratagem, suggested itself. All must be left to chance.

At a glance he noticed, on being ushered into her presence, that she was not looking well; that she was pale; that her eyes had a questioning, disturbed look.

Elise welcomed him cordially, and with something of her former gaiety of manner; yet, to the observant man, it seemed forced.

Murphy was straightforward, almost blunt. His very embarrassment at the undertaking led him to plunge at once into the business that brought him there. He began by saying that he had heard that there had been words between the brothers. Elise listened disinterestedly, though Murphy, watching her, detected a sudden revengeful glint come in her eyes at the mention of Richard. He continued his story without disclosing the name of his informant, and was about to repeat Richard's reply to Jacques, on being ordered to leave the club, when Elise cut him short. She had been pondering, her eyes on the ground, and as she straightened herself in her chair, she asked, haughtily:

"Monsieur Murphy, what did you come here for?"

The direct question disconcerted him. He hesitated, attempted to answer; but she did not give him the time.

"Bah! I am surprised at your listening to an old gambler's yarn. *Peu importe!*" she exclaimed, indignantly. "No, no!" she took the words from his lips; "do not deny it. I know who told you these things."

For the moment, Murphy's heart seemed to be making explorations at the bottom of his shoes. His hopes for a successful interview were vanishing further and further away; but defeat made him all the more eager. He would try again, on another tack—appeal to her generosity.

"I say, Mam'selle Elise, can't you give me a lift—some little bit of news?"

Elise regarded him mockingly. "About what? About the man who comes to see me?" She shrugged her shoulder and laughed cynically. "*Mon cher* Murphy, there are too many." After a moment, a slight frown crossed her face, then she went on: "Perhaps Christine meant your friend Monsieur Drake. He often used to come here. By the way, where is he now?"

She gazed into vacancy, and so seemingly unconscious was she of having asked a question that Murphy did not at once reply, but took the

occasion to collect his scattered thoughts and prepare his campaign. Like a flash, it occurred to him that she was infatuated with Drake. His own visions of glory fled; and loyally, he turned to his friend. Drake! Could it be possible that he was interested in her? Then he thought of Pete, and that Drake, in all probability, was the man the old gambler referred to. The idea was too much for the fun-loving Patriarch, and he burst with muffled laughter.

Elise was now watching him, and an angry flush spread over her face.

"You seem mirthful," she said, irritably.

Murphy checked his laughter. "Pardon me, Mam'selle Elise," he choked forth. "You asked me about Drake? I haven't seen him lately. I think he's in love."

Murphy's cleverness had returned, and was about to be tested. Should he tell her of Drake's devotion to Miss Woolford and rely on her jealousy; or, rather flatter her vanity? He anxiously awaited her next question. It was soon forthcoming.

"Who is she?" she inquired, confusedly, but offhand.

Murphy thought there was a shade of passion in the words. It decided for him.

"Marcia Woolford."

She was unable to conceal her agitation; and flushed and paled in quick succession.

"*Grand Dieu!*" she cried, starting to her feet. "Henry Woolford's sister!" Then she burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

Murphy was alarmed; and for a moment thought that the woman had lost her senses. Gradually, she calmed down; but not before the hysteria had turned to tears; then exhausted, she sank back with studied negligence among the cushions, regarded him fixedly, and said:

"You must excuse me, *mon ami*, I have been upset lately. I was angry when you came." Then she arose, walked over to him and placed her hand on his arm. "You must go now." She spoke with nervous haste. "But first, I want to ask you to do me a favour." She dropped her eyelids expressively, and then glanced up again. "Will you?"

"Certainly," Murphy answered, looking down very tenderly into her upturned face. "Name it." Afterwards, he realised how completely he had been under the charm of her fascination. Though he could not have refused her anything, intuitively he anticipated that she was going to ask that which he was most anxious to grant.

A tear, that she could not prevent, glimmered in the corner of her eye, when at last she ventured, very low:

"Tell Monsieur Drake that I wish to see him."

CHAPTER XVII

And over all there hung a shadow and a fear;
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And seemed to say, as plain as whisper in the ear,
"The house is haunted."

—Thomas Hood.

It was late when Drake reached home after his evening with Marcia. All the hours of the night he toiled futilely up the hills of dream, and tumbled back upon the hard levels of wakefulness. At last, near daybreak, he fell into a heavy sleep, and when, toward noon, he was aroused from this, it was to feel a vague and ominous expectancy, as if he were awaiting a blow and found himself surprised that it did not come. He lay still, and for a few seconds waited, slowly wakening; then there came storming a troop of recollections of all the night's events, knocking at his reason's gates. With little resistance, he let the whole mob in, to trample and subdue him. When they had hurt him till he would cringe no more (for even keenest weapons of regret and retrospection dull with use), they vanished, one by one, till there were but two—two captain memories: one, of sweet and gentle

aspect; the other, truculent and menacing,—strange allies in the siege.

Marcia had said she loved him. As with the freshness of a summer morning, the thought invigorated and solaced him; the other, staying recollection would not so shape itself to his content. At intervals it intimidated him. Finally, he knew it could be repulsed no longer. It must be faced and dealt with.

Marcia had refused to marry him; had declined to give any reason; had begged, if he loved her, to leave her with her sorrow. The cause of her refusal was not wholly a mystery to him, for the short time Woolford had been in the room last evening had confirmed his impression that the man was utterly unstrung, overworked—if nothing more. Perhaps it was the fear of its being something worse that was troubling Marcia. Insane! What? He shrank. The word had a gruesome sound. Henry insane—mad? There was a possibility of it. No wonder she had refused him. A certain dull, appalling horror of what it meant to her—to them—grew upon him. In despair, he sank back among the pillows, and moaned.

For a long time he lay there with his hands pressed to his face. Gradually hope asserted itself. Something must be done; Woolford

might come out all right. Marcia loved him! Ah, there was such sweetness in that. It gave him strength; his doubts and fears vanished. Presently his mother knocked at the door, to tell him it was time to get up. He leaped from the bed, dressed, trying all the while to form some plan of action.

From his home he went direct to Dr. Hammond, to whom he related the events of the previous night: his love for Marcia—Woolford's actions—all.

The old doctor listened in silence, his white head bowed in thought. His brows were firmly knit, and there came a worried expression over his features.

"Allan, my dear boy, I am very glad you came to me," he said, very quietly. "I have studied Woolford's case, and have tried to help him. In the first place, when he was in college, he had an amazing capacity for study, developed an exceptional memory, and had the most evenly balanced mind I ever knew. I was certain that some day he would astonish the world, for with all his gifts he had a cheerful, optimistic disposition. Well, he was attacked by meningitis, and came out of the fever after I had given up all hope of his recovery; but, from that time he has always had a tendency to mel-

ancholia. His mind, by a strange process, seemed to have concentrated all its powers into one function, and that is: the ability to penetrate the veils of speech, the manners that men wear, and to read their inmost thought, motives, and character. From the very ideal of broad and mighty intelligence he was transformed into the incarnation, I may say, of logic and analysis, as applied particularly to the study of the abnormal and the criminal in man. As a criminal lawyer, you know what he has done, and will readily understand what I mean. He confined his researches to law, philosophy, and psychology. For a time he was so zealous that I feared his mind would give way under the strain; but his wonderful physique accounts for this endurance.

"However, I soon noticed one thing: he developed an antipathy to other men—a resentment of anything that resembled an attempt to influence him. He refused absolutely to listen to suggestions or advice, even from me, his physician and oldest friend. I think, all this time, he has had a keen and true appreciation of his own condition. I say this, because he has read my entire library in search of professional discussion and treatment of such cases as his own."

The doctor hesitated a moment, and then declared, emphatically:

"I think the fever, followed by his tremendous amount of work, has left his mind in a condition to breed hallucinations; but for pathological reasons, and from what I know of Henry Woolford, I can assure you with the utmost certainty that, in my mind, he is not insane—probably never will be, and, what will please you also, that I have never been able to discover any traces of insanity in his family."

Drake gave a sigh of relief.

"But the cure?" he asked, anxiously.

"I cannot tell," was the reply; then he spoke feelingly, and with growing interest. "I want Henry to go away—consult the specialists of Paris and Berlin." The doctor paused and shook his head. "My theory may be all wrong. I've had theories smashed before. We're smashing several old ones every day. However, I am confident that Henry can be saved. We must save him, if only for Marcia's sake. God bless her!"

Both men had risen. The doctor, leading his visitor to the door, stopped and laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, and said:

"If you win her, my boy, you'll get a treasure."

Drake left the doctor's office and strode along the streets in a far happier frame of mind. The mass of care and anxiety was no longer with him. The doctor had given him renewed hope. Before he had gone very far he encountered Murphy. The latter, since his interview with Elise, had been thinking the matter out and was on the lookout for Drake. It was evident that if Elise would give any information, it would be to Drake. She undoubtedly was interested in him, and this fact would have to be turned to account.

"See here, old man," he blurted out. "If you're not in a hurry, I want a few words with you."

"Fire away," was the instant rejoinder. "I'm deuced glad to see you. Where have you been keeping yourself lately?"

Murphy related briefly what had happened. His conversation with Pete, his interview with Elise, her evident reticence, denial, and, lastly, his belief that the only thing now was for him to see her at once.

"All right. But why should she tell me?"

"Well," Murphy replied, lingering over the word, and then lurching ahead; "because I think she has taken a fancy to you."

"What rot!" Drake sneered.

"Yes," Murphy went on, jokingly, "it's strange, I'll admit, but it's a fact. It's a big chance to get at the bottom of this strangling business. You'd better cinch it." And after a few words of good-natured banter, he fled, leaving Drake somewhat irresolute and strangely reluctant.

Absorbed in Marcia and her suffering, Drake could think of nothing else. Somehow, he felt, although it was a matter of business, that to see Elise would not be treating Marcia exactly right; but he could not afford to allow anything to stand in the way of unravelling this mystery, in which a renewed interest seemed suddenly to have been awakened. Elise undoubtedly knew more than she had ever revealed, and, although he paid little attention to the real purport of Murphy's words with regard to himself, it put an end to hesitation.

That night found him with Elise. She was clad in a cream-coloured kimona of the softest, clinging Asiatic silk, with little clouds of lace in the flowing sleeves and peeping from the edges on her bosom. A bit of her white neck showed; her cheeks were red; the inevitable rose was in her hair, and while her eyes were languorous and still in their violet shadows, they

revealed night-black depths where warm constellations swam and whirled.

Elise led him direct to her own apartments. These consisted of three rooms on the second floor, running straight back from the front of the house. The double doors between the first and the second rooms were wide open, making them essentially one room, spacious, brilliantly lighted, richly furnished. The walls were frescoed in buff and pearl, delicate greens and touches of vanishing pink. Here and there were pictures, some in oil and a few old prints. At first the harmony and artistic excellence that prevailed surprised Drake; but a second later he recalled what Woolford had told him about Jacques Therdier. He was thinking of him when Elise, without a word, led him through the partly open doors into the third room—her boudoir. Drake expected to find opulence there, but was unprepared for the riotous extravagance of this room. The decorative abandon of it was not in indisputable taste; but there could be no denial of its effect upon the senses. He felt as if he were suddenly being ushered into a garden of roses, and the daring use of colour gave him an indescribable sensation—a feeling of intoxication and irresponsibility.

The carpet under his feet was deep and yield-

ing, and its pattern was a conglomerate of fallen petals of the rose. Presently there came to him the recollection of an old-fashioned rose-bush he had once seen—the velvet rose, they had called it, because of its singularly dark hue and velvety texture. This carpet looked and felt as if a dozen such rosebushes had, on a summer evening, shed all their curling, dewy blooms upon the floor, and it seemed to Drake that he should tread lightly there, not to crush them.

The walls were covered with the heaviest silk, also in rose tints. Up to the height of five or six feet, there was a quilted, silken wainscoting, if it might be so called, of the colour of the richest hothouse rose and studded with golden-tufted nails. Above this the silken fabric hung loosely in mounting masses of colour, paling upward, tint by tint, till, at the ceiling's marge, the shade was that of the wild rose in early June. In all this drapery there was no evidence of design; but the silk fell here in negligent folds; there in sweeping loops; again in a careless tangle. The ceiling was covered with a loosely woven web of silk in all the blended tints of rose that the most persistent florist ever got by grafting and interbreeding; and heightened and relieved with interweavings of old gold and palest yellows—all brilliant, artificial, and bewil-

dering. In all the room there was not a sharp angle to be seen, not a spot of hard wall, not a thing that might suggest resistance or interrupt a dream. Everything was silken, soft, and voluptuous. Even the lamps that illuminated this fictitious rose garden, save for one, in ornate bronze, upon the dressing-table, were hidden away in the folds of draperies, their radiance softened and subdued. In a corner was a couch upholstered in rose-coloured velvet, with a great quilt in tender yellow thrown over its foot, and fallen upon the floor.

There was but one picture on the wall—a copy in oil of "Bacchante." It was in the ornamentation of the large dressing-table that, with its full-length mirror, occupied almost half one side of the room, that Elise had let her fancy have unrestricted play. Here, as well as on the rosewood table, were innumerable trinkets and precious bric-a-brac: statuettes in ivory and ebony; fantastic images in silver and gold; miniatures—a dozen of them on ivory; golden chains and strings of gems; tiny sketches in oil and water colours, all heaped and thrown negligently about, as if not one of them could amuse Elise for longer than a vagrant minute. On one end of the dressing-table was a lamp in the form of a bronze Mercury; on the other, an

ugly Chinese god, exquisitely done in old ivory and gold, held up a smoking pastille from which the cloying odour fell heavily upon the room, to complete the sensuous enchantment.

Elise gave him both her hands. He took them, held them a moment and quickly dropped them again; then found a seat on the couch. Her gaze did not for an instant leave his face. She watched every expression, for she did not underestimate his indifference. As men were drawn to her, so was she attracted to him. It was her turn now; and in that very thought she found a new, thrilling, revolutionary joy. At last, for the first time in her life, she had met one who seemed to mean something to her, and enchained her; and in the desire to please him she felt emotions heretofore unknown, and marshalled all her forces to conquer him.

"You look used up?" Very sweetly she said it.

"But I'm not—only tired." Drake answered in a tone close to resentment.

"May I get you something to drink?"

Drake shook his head.

"*Tiens*, I have it!" she said. "I'll make you some Russian tea. I used to drink it in Paris, when I felt—*bouleversée*—" and, catching herself, "out of sorts." And going to fetch the things, she turned and remarked, lightly: "Do

you know that you have not been to see me in an age? How long it seems since that night, you remember, when we watched—the spies of the 'Compagnie.'" She did not wait for an answer, but flitted out of the room.

Drake, left alone, allowed his gaze to wander about him. He felt there was too much of everything. Too much silk, too much colour, too much perfume, too much warmth; that it was false, tinged with Oriental extravagance, and unhealthful. And yet, presently, he felt stealing over him an influence singularly soothing, oddly enervating. Then, the rustling of silken garments reached his ears and arrested his revery, as the hiss of a snake among the grasses breaks the lounger's dream.

"It won't do for me to stay here long," he acknowledged to himself, and walked over to the rosewood table to look at a high-keyed oil that had caught his eye. It was the picture of a smiling, black-haired imp of a girl, in whose dark eyes was the old challenge irresistible. It was so well painted that Drake looked at it long and critically. It was signed, "Therdier"; and on the back these lines, from Rossetti's "Jenny":

> "Lazy, laughing, languid Jenny,
> Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea."

He was still studying it when Elise returned with the samovar and accessories and placed them on a small table.

"Just one of Therdier's. He paints well, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Drake put the picture down and looked long and admiringly at her. As she busied herself at the table he found himself trying to analyse her beauty. No wonder she fired the blood of men! There was nothing lacking to the eye. The Creator had given to her physical perfection and that ineffable thing called charm. What heights within her power, had she been placed in a different sphere! But, beautiful as she was, he could remain passive to her fascinations.

Elise was now pouring the tea. She raised her downcast eyes, and, with a smile which said many things at the same time, broke the silence:

"I have never met any one quite like you. You are so—so—*sympathique.*"

"Indeed!" he answered, briefly.

The girl winced a little, then presently laid down her cup, arose and stood before him, her hands clasped behind her, a faint smile on her lips. Something in her eyes told Drake that he was hurting her with his indifference. A slight pang of regret stirred in the man, and unconsciously he stretched out his hand. She took a

step forward, hesitated, and then retraced her steps to the table. Sinking back in her chair, she drew a deep breath.

"What is it, Mam'selle Elise?" Drake asked, melting somewhat. "Is anything serious troubling you?"

"No. I was thinking of you," was the simple answer.

"Well?"

"I told you a great deal about myself once," she went on, slowly. "I think it was the first time we met."

Drake did not answer. It was as if he had not heard.

"*Eh, quoi!* You have forgotten?" She shrugged her shoulder with annoyance.

"Elise," he began, "Murphy gave me your message."

The man's manner had suddenly changed. He was looking at her intently.

Elise flushed with satisfaction at the more intimate tone.

"I wish to be your friend," he continued. "I am your friend."

Elise was staring down at the floor where her white-slippered feet were buried in the rose-leaves. She raised her eyes and met his gaze. For a time she seemed to be debating his mean-

ing. Should she trust him? She longed to lay her heart bare to him.

"Isn't there something you wish to tell me?" he asked, feelingly.

Slowly, she opened her red lips, and said, with some agitation:

"There is nothing to tell, except, perhaps, that I am upset over some angry words I had with Jacques about a man, unknown to him, who comes here to see me."

Drake looked at her searchingly. He was growing excited. Was the crucial moment at hand? Instinct warned him to be prudent. The secret could not be wrenched from her; it must come voluntarily.

Whatever the question he may have decided to put to her, it was forestalled by a wave of her hand.

"You do not know him," she continued, and then added, with bitterness, "Oh, how I hate him!"

"Then why do you allow him to come here?" was Drake's natural rejoinder.

"Oh, what difference does it make! *Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*," she said, dejectedly.

"Don't be foolish. You are young and very, very beautiful. Why, most women would con-

sider themselves extremely fortunate if they possessed half of your beauty."

Elise was transformed with ecstasy.

"You think I am beautiful?" she cried, joyfully, while the lights of vanity and love drove the shadows from her eyes.

"Yes. How could anybody help seeing it?"

Elise failed to perceive that Drake's answer was in a tone devoid of any warmth; that he merely stated facts.

"Look!" she exclaimed, and quickly stood before him. With swift movements of her hands she loosed her glorious hair and shook it till it fell around her like yards of wonderful silk veil. She unfastened her gown at the throat and untied the heavy cords that bound it around her waist, so that the thin fabric hung loosely, but with the singular fidelity of silk, to her rounded figure. Then she parted her hair away from her face, and her throat and neck were bare, and, looking down at him with radiant eyes, she cried:

"Look! Is any woman more beautiful than I?"

"No," said Drake, quickly, his eyes wide with appreciation of her loveliness. Murphy's words came back to him, and he flushed guiltily. Sud-

denly, at the recollection of Marcia, he bowed his head and his face burned.

Elise paused, moved closer to him, and laid one hand upon his shoulder.

"Allan!" Her whisper was scarcely a breath, though there was feeling enough in her tone to melt a heart of ice.

The man did not lift his eyes or answer.

Elise's hands fell hopelessly at her side, and there was a fast-growing look of despair on her face as she comprehended her impotence to arouse any responsive chord.

Drake made a movement to go.

"*Pas encore*," she pleaded. Then, in sudden desperation, "I'll tell you everything."

Drake's head whirled. Conflicting emotions arose within him; the blood clogged in his heart; a wave of fright, horror, and awe swept over him and left him cold and inert. The rose room became suddenly blood-red and menacing, as if the strangler himself were there. He was dumb; his instincts slow in reviving. Then he seized her almost brutally by the shoulders.

"Who is he?" he cried, hoarsely. "Tell me——"

"Not to-night," she protested, feebly.

Elise paled from the touch of his hands upon her shoulders; paled still more from the thrills

that ravished her; but she did not move, and soon she did not feel the pain. Drake's touch was stirring her blood to violence; her cheeks blazed; her eyes were wide.

The excitement of the moment, the perfume-laden air, the breath of the girl hot upon his cheek threw Drake into a delirium. He looked at her—the fairest woman he had ever seen. Looked at her; and his breath came short.

Elise saw that look; heard the quick breathing, and, with a swift motion of rapture, threw her warm, bare arms around his neck. Drake's head fell forward slowly, and he drew her to him.

At that instant there came to both the instinct which gives warning of impending peril; the peculiar consciousness of an unnatural influence; an alien presence, which was immediately verified by the sound of a soft, stealthy, cat-like tread.

Elise pushed him violently from her, and, pointing, cried: "*Là!* Some one is there!" and rushed into the next room in time to see the figure of a man disappearing through the door.

"Who is it?" Drake asked, quickly following her.

Elise did not answer, but for some moments clung desperately to him, as if determined to



"'LA! SOME ONE IS THERE!'"

prevent any pursuit. Then, as suddenly, he felt her gripping fingers relax their hold and in amazement he saw her stagger back from him and sink exhausted into a chair, covering her face with her hands, as if to shut out from sight some calamitous and appalling apparition. Uncertain what to do, and himself strangely affected by the contagious apprehension of peril, vaguely sentient of something uncanny in the situation, he tried to elicit some information from her; but Elise would not speak, and, at last realising the futility of his efforts, he summoned a servant to her aid and promptly departed.

CHAPTER XVIII

"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known."

—Dickens.

In a gelid cavern of the North, a wind was born. Wrapped in its swaddling-clothes of snow, it drooled among the matron pines, whose sombre lullabies were ineffectual to bring it sleep. The baby cougars cuddled contentedly among the rocks; the caribou kept to the closeness of sheltered hollows; the grizzlies wallowed and waited patiently for spring; but the infant wind, ugly, and distempered from its birth, puled peevishly in its cradle, and would not be gently ruled. Like a monster born to complete depravity, it never was really young; but bounded one day from its cradle, and was up and away to vent its spite upon the earth and its inhabitants. The world was before it: great fields invited it to havoc; cities and hamlets tempted it to ravage them; mountains offered great stepping-stones, where it might leap from peak to peak, and start avalanches to bury clinging camps in ruin: the world was before it

—a world that was full of things to feed its fury, to gratify its malice, to satiate the cravings of this rabid giant of the North. Oh, to be away across the world! The hollows and the rocks of home could no longer please it; the songs of the pines were monotonous and galling to this fretful thing; the playmates in the caves but enraged it with their happiness. So the wind snarled a short farewell to home and kin and country, and was off, like any wild marauder, punitive and keen, with a breath that blasted, and blows that shattered; and a tread that left frozen footprints, measuring league on league. Bellowing a challenge to the universe, and rioting in destruction, it went its way; it bounded from range to range of mountains and tore the forests to pieces; it stooped into quiet valleys, and smote the frail fabrics of the towns; it caught a camp of miners in Montana unprepared, and left them starving in the snow; it swooped upon the Red Desert of Wyoming, and buried a hundred herds of sheep in whited sepulchres; it strode across the plains of the Dakotas, and laughed while the cattle bunched themselves in the shallow ravines, and died. Weary at intervals, it whimpered sullenly over fields of thin, grey grass, and mocked the wolf's long howl; and then it rose up again, and shrieked in anger,

and with frosty hands sowed snow and sleet upon the stricken earth. For days and days it scourged the lands, and charged like a howling dervish across the States; wiped out boundaries, and levelled landscapes, and spread a pall upon the sun itself. But it became tired at last of evil-doing; and satiated with destruction, and wrapped in melancholy, it bent its heavy steps toward the south, to vent its senile temper upon the bandaged orchards of the Arkansas, and to stir up strife among the zephyrs of the Southland. And in its passage over Colorado, it whined day after day like a savage thing shorn of its strength, impotent in rage. It clawed at the spires of Denver; it daubed the houses with chimney soot; it waited at corners to slap the pinched faces of pedestrians; it filled the town with chill discomfort and discontent. And it was evil from its birth until its end came amid anathemas and pain.

All day Henry Woolford sat at his study window, looking without seeing, hearing, or heeding anything at all. He did not see the bare trees shivering and cringing beneath the lashing of the storm; he did not see the thin, dry snow heaping up behind the fences and the angles of the houses; he did not hear the demo-

niacal grieving of the wind, nor the dolorous creaking of the maples on the lawn; he did not feel the raw coldness in the air; he did not seem to heed the dejection of the day, or the nervous irritation there was in the hard and arid atmosphere. The room itself was cold. In the grate were the ashes of last night's fire. Henry had risen early, but had eaten neither breakfast nor midday meal, and had refused to permit the servant to make a fire, or to place the room in order. He sat in his chair all day; and his mood, heavier than the day's, was beyond amelioration and beyond increase. All day he scarcely stirred, and to break the utter stillness of the study there was nothing but the occasional rattling of the windows, and the sorry scraping of a maple bough across the window-pane.

For a week past Henry had not once been in his office. His mail had accumulated amazingly and day by day was arranged in heaps by his assistants. Visitors had called again and again; but in vain. Through his failure to appear in court, two cases, for which long preparation had been made, were continued to another term. He was missed from his accustomed places, but his associates commented only that nothing Woolford ever did or failed to do surprised

them. When he left the house, that week, it was only to take long walks; and save for these brief respites, he was shut up in his study with his own sufficient and implacable soul. Marcia, in the few glimpses she had of him that week, had watched him carefully. It relieved, yet disturbed her to see that he was so self-controlled and natural. There was no pacing the floor, no outbreak of passion or discontent, no chafing, and no raging at mankind. He was not in one of his dreaded moods; but in some strange lethargy or transport that was above and beyond comprehension. The expression of his face was profoundly melancholy, and his demeanour still and grave. The effect of all this upon Marcia was more saddening than anything she had ever felt in the most violent of his moods. Late in the afternoon, she could refrain no longer, but stole softly into Henry's room, and slipped into a chair in a corner far away from him. If he heard her enter, he gave no sign, but sat motionless in his chair with his face toward the window. The wind was failing now, with the coming on of darkness. The sky shut out the sun, as with a roof of slate; and there was no streak or glow to mark its setting. Night came, as if the roof were settling down upon the world, crowding the vapours, thickening the atmos-

phere, and forcing even the malignant wind to flight. Such twilight is a burden to the cheeriest souls, and a load too heavy upon one beset.

The leaden minutes toiled along and brought no change. Henry sat in adamantine stillness, and Marcia did not stir. The wan light crept slowly from the room to join the departing spirits of the day; and the shadows, as if emboldened by the silence, stole out of the corners, slipped along the walls, and crawled like spies around the furniture. Henry minded neither departing light nor advancing shadows, but sat immovable. In that hour, Marcia realised how little the most loving heart can prevail against sorrow and pain, and understood the impotence of sympathy. She could only fold her hands and wait among the shadows. The shadows! They crept from behind the bookshelves, and dropped from the hangings, and hung from the edges of the pictures, and trooped from every nook and corner, skulking, grimacing, and gesturing. They crawled toward Henry, where he sat with his still figure outlined against the square of feeble light; and they surrounded him, and made him prisoner; and it appeared to Marcia's frightened fancy that they were about to lift him and bear him away. When she checked

such foolish imagining, she was stricken with a horrible premonition; for this was like a prophecy, this shadow-play—the vanishing of the light, and the trooping in of the shadows to envelop him—shadows, shadows, shadows. She could be still no longer. She must speak.

But Henry was the first to say a word.

"You are missing your dinner, I think, Marcia," he said. He had been conscious of her presence then, all the while. He spoke as naturally and as evenly as if they had been talking together all this time.

"I'm not hungry, brother, but I'll eat if you'll let me bring you something too. We can dine together here."

Henry did not answer. The servant knocked, and Marcia softly bade her enter and light the lamps. Henry gave no sign that he noticed; but Marcia was strangely relieved when the shadows fled to their hiding-places. The servant noiselessly retired.

After a brief interval Henry continued, as if their talk had been but interrupted:

"I want you always to keep the books that are in this room, Marcia. All through my life they have been the very best friends I have had. I love them all. From the time I was a boy in grammar school, one after another, each in



"THE TROOPING IN OF SHADOWS TO ENVELOP HIM—."

turn has always been close to me. They have been true and patient."

He had not yet moved from the position he had occupied before the window for many hours; but now he rose from his chair, and walked across the room to one of the large bookcases which filled all the wall space in the study. His manner presented a singular inconsistency. He was calm to the degree of serenity, steady in his speech, natural and familiar in his attitude, as he strode across the floor and stood in front of the bookcase. But beneath all this there was a hint of something that had been quelled, killed, and buried. The grass upon a grave may be as fine and as sweet as that upon the virgin hillside; but it is not the same, and can never be, though the thing beneath shall no more stir nor start nor shiver. So there was a disquieting quality in the serenity that was upon Woolford now; and Marcia, though she denied it bravely, knew instinctively that there was a fault, an incompleteness somewhere. She listened eagerly, hopefully, and yet in awe.

"I've wondered often why some books are favourite books," he said. "Of course, I know why they are, and yet there is a pleasant mystery about it all. There are many books here, and many more down in the library—great

books, nearly all of them—books of the masters, histories of the great ones, symbols of thoughts that have lived through the ages undenied. And yet they have no equality in our affections. We pass by one with a glance, and seize upon another. There are books we like, and books we love; books we honour, and books we cherish; books we admire upon the shelves, and books we thrust beneath our pillow when we go to sleep. Some one has said that we have ancestors of the intellect as well as ancestors of the body, and a lineage of the spirit as clearly marked as a family tree. Here are my other ancestors—here in my favourite books. I've kept them here because I could not bear to have them banished in the library downstairs. They have watched me at my work, they have kept wakeful through the long, long nights, and they have been close when I slept. And they have been tyrants, too, for they have kept me awake oftener than they have talked me to sleep. Pleasant, precious comrades, these."

One by one he took them in. his hands, and looked wistfully at them, and caressed them. Many were worn and ragged from much reading, and they opened in his hands, as the soul of a man opens to the touch of his friend. Between certain leaves were thrust slips of paper

covered with Henry's handwriting; and on the margins were scribbled notes. Here and there, as he saw familiar passages, the light shone in his eyes. There was a Byron that was old enough to have earned respect, and it was almost a wreck; but rich in associations and memories. It opened in his hand at about the middle of the third canto of "Childe Harold." Henry cast his eye upon the page, and read aloud, slowly and without special accent:

"'He who ascends to mountain tops shall find
The loftiest peaks most wrapped in clouds and snow;
He who surpasses or subdues mankind
Must look down on the hate of those below.'"

When he had finished reading he stood looking at the page for several minutes, but made no comment. Then he closed the book, and turned it over and over, in his hands, and at last gently placed it in its case. Near to the Byron was an old volume of Emerson's essays, in a cover that had once been green, but was now faded and blackened to an indeterminate hue. Henry took this, and fondled it.

"What a grand old mystic!" he said. "Little fellows who have not been able to understand him, or to dream with him, have dared to sneer at Emerson; and have subjected his mighty symphonies to the test of their ordinary

intelligence. We may never expect to understand him. The reason we can read him again and again, is that we can read new meanings into his words at every perusal. If there are passages that baffle us, it is not because they are meaningless, but because we have not grown enough to reach him, or because mere words never can express the thoughts he had. With all our refinement of language, there are thoughts that never can be told—thoughts that ever must be the sole property of the thinker, and that lie in the grave with him until they come again in the brain of some other chosen one."

There was more of pity than contempt in his tone that night, for he was not angry with the world, but only sorry for it.

Henry kept the book in his hand, and walked over to where Marcia sat silent in her chair. He rested the hand that was disengaged gently upon her head.

"Marcia," he said, "much as you have loved your brother, helped him, studied with him, I'm afraid you have understood him little better than the other people who have known him. I do not care now what the others think; but I'd like, Marcia, if you would understand—if you would know what Henry Woolford thinks of

himself. I couldn't tell you before, but I can now. I have always believed in myself till this hour. I thought I was one of the doers in the world. I knew, Marcia, that I could think with them, could live their life of the intellect and the soul. I could look above the levels—upward, as Ibsen says, 'upward toward the stars, toward the great silence.' I worked hard, Marcia, as you have known these many years—worked myself into a fever, and lived, against the fateful dictum of the physicians, to go on with my great purpose. It was a great purpose; and I have come so near to completing it—to realising all my aims—so near—so near that—well, Marcia, one tiny cell of this brain has failed to do its work. No machine is proof against an accident; none can be guaranteed to have no fault. Even God's works—where do we find them perfect! Perhaps our imperfections were his great intent. We have seen men who—wait——" He went to the bookcase again, and placed the Emerson back upon its shelf. Then he brought forth his Shakespeare, tattered, soiled, and marked with myriad pencillings. Opening it, he turned quickly to "Hamlet," and read:

"'So, oft it chances in particular men,
That for some vicious mole of nature in them,

As, in their birth (wherein they are not guilty
Since nature cannot choose his origin),
By their o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason;
Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens
The form of plausive manners; that these men,
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect;
Being nature's livery or fortune's star,
Their virtues else (be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo),
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault.'

"Well," he went on, "it would have been worth while—in a world that is so little worth the while—to stand upon the topmost peak, and 'look down on the hate of those below.' Peaks are barren, lonely places. Few men could be happy there—few who do not want the babble of the street. I think I could—amid the lightning and the vapours and the thunderbolts. Besides, the winning of the peak! That is the greatest glory. It was mine; I was beginning to feel it, when——"

He did not finish the sentence, but broke off abruptly in a manner that betokened an end of things, and held all the pathos of the incomplete. Tears rolled down Marcia's cheeks, and she wrung her hands. For a little while the silence was unbroken; then Marcia found her voice again.

"Don't despair, Henry!" she pleaded. "You have gifts—the greatest gifts in the world. You have always won. Don't give up now!"

Henry shook his head, and did not reply.

"You've won every fight with the world and with other men," said Marcia. "You are not going to be beaten in this fight with yourself!"

Henry walked to the window, and looked out into the night. Far across the city and the low hills, the bulging outlines of the mountains were barely visible. Vague blurs of white in the gloom showed where the snow lay on the peaks. As he looked, the grey-black blanket of the clouds was torn by some vagrant wind; and through the rift a pale star shone for a few seconds, and was hid again. Henry saw it come and go; and as if moved to a sudden thought by it, he turned abruptly, and once more stood by the bookcase. With the certainty of familiarity, he placed his hand upon a small volume of the last poems of Tennyson. He did not look at his sister; but opened the book at the last page, gazed at it a minute or more, and then read deliberately and quietly, as if they were a prayer, these two stanzas:

"'Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me;
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

"'Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark;
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark.'"

Marcia was sobbing softly, in her shadowed corner of the room.

CHAPTER XIX

O most delicate fiend!
Who is't can read a woman?
—SHAKESPEARE'S *Cymbeline.*

THE storm was at its height. Drake's brain, as he looked through the windows at the fury of the blast, was filled with the happenings of last night. Who was this unknown visitor who came so stealthily upon them, and disappeared as furtively as he had come? What was the apparition that had so completely overpowered Elise? Was it possible that he had been in close vicinity of the mysterious murderer? He shuddered inwardly at the recollection of it. And then Elise. Why had fate intervened at the critical moment and prevented the one person who might, by some look or word, have betrayed, revealed, put an end to this unfathomable enigma? Finally, his thoughts reverted to Marcia, and he was filled with a futile anger when he found himself making comparisons between the woman he loved and Elise.

Marcia was good, true, lovable, and had such a sunny disposition. He did not want Elise. He did not love her.

Drake left the office. In the alley doorway he stopped to button his overcoat, for the wind was up in fury. The incandescent lamp, suspended there under its hood of tin, blinked like a frightened firefly that had been tricked, like many other summer folk, by autumn's golden promises. The snow was falling rapidly; but even now warm gusts of air combated with the sleety blasts, as if old Autumn, breathing hard, fought on with his face to the wintry foe.

Drake stepped down into the alley, and, on the first motion, halted in his tracks. He thought some one had called his name. He looked around and peered into the huddling dark; but no form was there that he could see. After an instant's pause, he started on again; but he had gone scarcely half a dozen paces when he felt a touch upon his arm. Turning, he saw, by the dim and troubled light, the figure of a woman at his side—slender and thinly, but brilliantly arrayed; her silken skirts clinging to her shivering legs; her feet clad in crimson slippers that were already soaking wet; her head and shoulders covered by a bright cloak clutched tightly at the throat by a jewelled hand. She let him look at her for a few wavering seconds, and then drew back the hood. It was Elise.

"I wanted to see you," she said, in a low, timid tone.

"What's the trouble? What brings you down here?" asked Drake.

She hesitated, ceased looking desperately into his eyes, and quickly dropped her gaze. Her fingers meanwhile fumbled nervously with the folds of the loosened cloak.

"Well?" he asked, impatiently.

She looked up at him again, and even in the faint light of the tossing incandescent, he could see a look of terror in her eyes.

"I came for you," she said, getting her voice again. "I'm frightened. Come up to the house, come! You'll not refuse me so little a thing, will you?"

Drake did not respond immediately.

Elise did not suspect the reason for his silence and she took courage from his hesitation, all the while watching the changes on the man's face.

"You will?" she asked, more bravely, but with touching reticence, and then, before he had time to reply: "You must!" And, drawing nearer to him, went on quickly: "Please, you surely don't want me to implore you?"

At that juncture there came the sound of hurrying footsteps. He felt Elise's hand steal into his, and he let her draw him into the deeper

shadow. A minute they stood there, hardly breathing. A man, with head bent low and his feet splashing in the slush, passed them and entered the building.

"You'll come," said Elise, entreatingly, and pressed his hand warmly. "Elise wants you for a little while. You are not afraid of Elise, are you?"

Without further discussion Drake suffered himself to be led away mechanically by her side.

When they emerged from the alley the wind hit them with all its force, and they must bend their bodies to meet it. Elise shivered and drew her cloak closer around her head and shoulders. Without the exchange of a word, they turned down the street and quickened their steps. At the first corner an electric car had just stopped with an impatient clanging of its gong, to pick up a quartette of rounders, and was now hurrying suburbward. Its departure left the street to Drake and Elise and a cheerful cabman whistling softly to himself in a doorway. A block further away they turned a corner and were a little sheltered from the wind. Then she straightened up, settled her arm more comfortably within the bend of Drake's and looked into his face, which, in the blue light from the arc-lamps, was cold, hard, and unresponsive. Yet

Elise felt no cause to be disheartened; he was obeying her. True, she had sought him out; and braved the storm to find him; waited for him, bedraggled, dishevelled, deplumed.

When a woman does that for a man, let not that man be puffed with vanity or triumph; rather let him be on his guard against the time when he shall pay for that well-remembered humiliation. Elise proceeded to complete her own abasement and to prepare for his.

"I have been expecting to see you all the morning. After last evening," she went on, petulantly, "I thought you would be anxious—that you might have inquired."

Drake answered absently, with a monosyllable. Though seemingly unconscious of her words, all the faculties of his mind were keenly on the alert. The feeling, partaking of disinclination and aversion, that he had experienced the first few moments Elise and he were together, had entirely disappeared and given way to a determination not to leave her until her secret was his.

When they reached her apartments Elise flung herself just as she was, wet and dripping, on the divan in the room of roses; and from one of her slippers trickled, unheeded, a discolouring stream upon the robe.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked, persuasively, motioning to the place beside her.

He obeyed in silence.

"You didn't want to come," went on Elise, poutingly.

"Of course I did," he stammered, "but I must be off soon."

At this a little tremor passed over the girl and left her looking at Drake with a touch of that same terror in her eyes that he had seen before. It disconcerted him, but the next moment it had disappeared, and Elise was speaking in a steady tone.

"*Très bien*, if you must; but first, let me remove these wet things."

She passed by him and went into an alcove which he had not perceived before, so cleverly was it concealed by draperies. Presently, she emerged as beautifully arrayed as she had been the night before; but, somehow, there was a subtle, indefinable difference in her, in him, in everything. She sat beside him on the couch, looking at him beseechingly. Her evident attempts to conceal her distress were futile. She was plainly nervous and unstrung, and almost instantly cast a furtive glance over her shoulder, as if something threatened her. So irresistibly ingenuous did she seem to Drake as he

looked at her sitting there that he could hardly suppress a longing to take her in his arms, to comfort her as he would a frightened child.

"Elise," he began, presently, forcing himself to be stern, "why did you come for me to-night?"

The girl took some time to reply, and the man noticed that she shuddered and grew ghastly pale.

"I have a terrible presentiment that something is going to happen to me to-night. I don't much care; but, somehow, I felt that I must see you."

"Bosh! What could happen to you?"

"The man," she said, slowly, "that came here last night——"

Drake started at the words, and interrupted her impatiently: "What about him?"

"He came to kill me." She spoke calmly; but the sound of her words seemed to frighten her, for again she started and glanced nervously around her.

"A hundred times during the night I awoke in a cold sweat," she went on, hurriedly. "All day I have been terrified, trying to think—trying to make up my mind what to do—wondering if I cared. To-night, some strange influence seemed to hold me, chain me to these rooms. It

was all I could do to drag myself away to seek you."

There was a cynical smile on Drake's lips. He remained outwardly incredulous, hoping thus to precipitate an avowal from her.

"You don't believe me?" she cried, quivering with excitement. "*Ah, quel homme!* You don't know him."

"But why don't you tell me who the man is, if you expect anything of me?"

"No, no, impossible! The thought of him, even with you here at my side, makes me cold."

"Come, now, Elise, it can't be as serious as all that. You are unnerved, overwrought, and exaggerate the thing."

Elise was silent for a long time; quite abruptly the terror seemed to leave her, though she was grave and serious. Drake, watching the varying expressions on her face, wondered at her kaleidoscopic nature.

"Allan," she finally said, dropping her voice a note, "are you in love with Marcia Woolford?"

Drake was astonished. While inwardly he felt resentment and irritation at the question, he was fully aware that in the interrogation there was more than idle curiosity. He did not answer.

"Are you going to marry her?" Elise pursued, very gently, with averted face.

After a long pause, Drake slowly answered: "I want to—I hope to."

Elise shrank away from him, muttering something he could not understand.

Drake found his voice. "This man," he began, "is a Frenchman—has threatened to kill you—and because you will not marry him. Is that it?"

Elise looked up quickly, and nodded sadly.

"And you do not care for him?"

"No," she replied, with a shake of the head. "I was born to please, so it seems; but not the one I love." She covered her face at the humiliation of her confession, and wept bitterly.

"Don't! Don't! Everything will be all right. Don't feel so badly." The sight of her emotion affected him singularly. He wanted to say some reassuring, comforting word to her; but instead he tenderly placed his arm about her, and taking her hands stroked them till her tears had ceased.

After a long time the girl looked up imploringly into his face, and asked: "You do care for me, don't you, Allan?"

She leaned her head on his shoulder for a moment, and then slowly slipped from the couch

to the floor and knelt at his feet, resting her arms on his knees, and, looking caressingly, steadfastly at him, her eyes wandering for a long time on every feature of his countenance, finally lingering on his eyes, which, she saw with a pang, did not glisten beneath her gaze. Still, she looked at him, and the soul of the girl was pictured naked to him, so that he could not fail to understand.

"I wish to say something to you, Allan," she murmured, faintly.

Drake had never known her to speak so softly, pathetically as now.

"Probably I shall not see you after to-night for a long, long time. I may as well tell you all. When I first met this man I liked him. It was not long before I discovered that I could wind him around my finger. I grew to care for him more and more, because, well, he treated me kindly. Then, after a while, I discovered that his influence over me was becoming greater than mine over him; but I always gave in to him, somehow, no matter how hard I tried, and I tried very, very hard sometimes, for yielding to a man is no way to keep him infatuated. Well, he came to see me often. Sometimes, I think I loved him. Things went on that way till a few months ago, when he began to threaten me, and I became

afraid of him. I would have dismissed him entirely, had I dared, but every time I tried to tell him not to come again, the words stuck right here—and wouldn't come out." Elise put her hand to her throat and clutched it.

"When he asked to see me," she went on, "I could not, for the life of me, refuse. It's been that way all the time. I simply had to do the things he told me." Her voice broke in a sob.

"You mustn't let him influence you that way," said Drake. "Go away—do anything—but don't let him see you again."

"Oh, you don't know all! But never mind me. I didn't mean to make you feel badly. This is the last time Elise is going to talk to you. I am going away. Bear with me just a few minutes longer, for—don't you see, I—I love you."

Her voice was little louder than a whisper; yet Drake, though he felt her trembling with emotion, did not look down at her.

"You haven't understood," she went on. "I've loved you all the time." She paused. "Allan, tell me one thing: If I had been in a home just like your Marcia's, and—well, just that sort of a girl—would you have loved me?" She leaned forward to look into his troubled face.

"I don't know."

"I think I was born unhappy," she said. "God put a wrong streak in me. I've had to live Therdier's kind of a life; but many a night I've dreamed of a little home—and a husband—just like you would be, Allan. A home all my own—our own; where there would be no servants, and no crowds, and with my own fingers I should work for him and our children. These pretty hands! What good are they in the world?"

She looked at her tapering hands, all white and jewelled, and put them behind her, out of sight.

"You must forget me, Elise," Drake said, after a silence. "I don't want to be the cause of any unhappiness. I will always be your friend. Some day you'll find the man who will make you happy."

Drake faltered a little, feeling the insufficiency of words like these; but he was doing the best he could.

"Do you think I could ever care for any one else?"

"Yes, yes!" he said, hoarsely. "I am not the kind of man that would please you—you would tire of me—you scarcely know me. You'll soon forget me."

"I don't blame you," she replied, shaking her head with sad slowness. "You could not help it. But you'll think of me, sometimes, won't you? Ah, I love you!" She sighed deeply, and put her arms around his neck. She clung to him, kissing him again and again. "I love you, yes, I love you!"

At that moment there came from the adjoining room a low, thin cry, a crash, and the unmistakable thud of a falling body.

CHAPTER XX

> Oh, whither hast thou led me, Egypt? See,
> How I convey my shame out of thine eyes
> By looking back what have I left behind
> 'Stroyed in dishonour.
>
> —SHAKESPEARE.

WOOLFORD replaced his Tennyson on the bookshelf with loving care; then his mood instantly changed. His speech turned to a variety of subjects—law, crime, social problems, and even religion. His monologues, although slightly incoherent, were amazing in their brilliancy and profundity. It seemed to Marcia that his voice had lost none of its power, but rather had gained new qualities from the striving of his soul, as the ecstasy of pain invokes new tones for its expression. Marcia could not but listen, singularly fascinated. Gradually she became anxious, for she observed that, whatever the vagrancy of his mind, it was surely reverting to his familiar theme—contempt for mankind. He hated people; he loathed and despised them; they were weak, puny, and execrable. He strode up and down the room, gesticulating, hurling bitter, contemptuous words upon the

imagined heads of men. It was as if he was the reincarnation of that Roman emperor who wished that all mankind had but one neck that he might sever it at a blow. And yet, in the midst of this arraignment, he paused, and, looking keenly at Marcia, an expression of acute pain, almost shame, crossed his noble face. Then he went on again with his terrible denunciations.

Marcia could no longer endure the strain. She tried to convince herself that she imagined his condition to be more alarming than it really was; but this fond casuistry would not suffice. She could not conceal from herself the truth, or suppress her agitation. He was perceptibly growing worse. Quietly she slipped away, reached the telephone, which for just such purpose had been placed in her room, and called up Dr. Hammond. She longed for the sympathy, advice, and presence of the kind old man. He agreed to come immediately, on the pretence of a friendly visit, and comforted her with cheering words.

Marcia sat alone, waiting. For a brief instant her thoughts turned to Drake. She loved him. The full knowledge of it had come to her months before, like a storm in summer, overwhelming, chilling, electrifying her. It had

brought in its wake such freshness and delight of living that all the earth was green, and all the vistas were in flower. And then, a little later, the real storm descended upon her. Henry was ill. Indeed, she was in the valley of the shadow now, tossed, torn, beaten by the tempest. Drake's love was but a fleck of sunlight, elusory and sad upon a distant hill. Marriage! No, that was impossible—even if Henry should get well. It might be inherited; and her children! Never! She beat the word into her heart—into her brain—as Flagellants lash their naked flesh with whips.

When Dr. Hammond arrived, it required all his skill and tact to quiet the lawyer raging at the world and its follies.

"You haven't been sleeping well, Henry," said the doctor, pleasantly; "that's what's the matter with you."

"I haven't been sleeping at all," answered Woolford. The dark lines around his eyes gave support to that pathetic assertion.

"But I told you to rest," persisted the physician, watching his patient narrowly.

"Rest!" Henry exclaimed, with a metallic laugh. "How can a man rest, when——" He did not finish the sentence, but made a gesture, the very secret symbol of despair.

It was late when the doctor took his leave, after prescribing a sleeping draught; but Henry would have none of it, saying:

"No, I'll have none of it. If anything, I am more afraid of drugs than—of myself. Do not worry about me. Alone I'll go to the bitter end!"

There was that in the man's tone that forcibly emphasised the aloofness, separateness, oneness of his nature.

On parting with Marcia at the door, the old doctor told her that he thought Henry would be quiet now, and that in a few days he would take him to his ranch; but after that they must delay no longer, and start on the trip they had planned. The poor girl stifled, as well as she could, the sob that struggled to come forth with her good-night.

Henry was sitting in an easy-chair when Marcia returned, and permitted her to read to him. She was careful to select nothing that would excite or annoy him. She chose, after some deliberation, "David Copperfield," because it was one of his favourite books. She read a long time, and was in the middle of the chapter in which is related Micawber's denunciation of Heep, when suddenly she was impelled to look up from the printed page. She was startled to find Henry's eyes fixed upon

her, but with a far-away look in the distended pupils. There was, too, something in that gaze that horrified her.

"Henry!" she called, cautiously.

He did not answer; and it was plain that he had not listened to her reading. She spoke again a little louder. This time he heard her, but the expression in his eyes was not altered. And when he began to speak, his words had no relation to what she had been reading to him. He had been, and still was, in his own world of thoughts and things; and though he spoke her name, he was, it appeared, but vaguely conscious of her.

"Then there was Antony," he said, uttering aloud the continuation of his thought. "What a type of the conquered conqueror he was! 'I am dying, Egypt, dying!' All the petty pathos known of all the little men since Adam's fall cannot touch such heights of sadness and of pity. Tragedy? Why, Marcia, there is no other tragedy but this—the tragedy of greatness thrown at a woman's feet. Princes, founders of nations, saviours of their country, builders of empires, strong men, heroes, conquerors, men whose wills have overridden earth and peoples, men whose purposes and whose power have stormed at the gates of Heaven,

how many a one of even these has breathed away his might upon a woman's bosom, and has gladly bartered glory for a harlot's kiss."

Henry paused; and Marcia sank lower in her chair. Soon he went on:

"What is it—what can it be—this subtle power there is in some women! If they all had it, God pity the world! The lodestone draws and compels and holds the finest-tempered steel. Just as surely and inexplicably some women attract and fascinate all men. From their lips, eyes, hair, every tiny pore of their fragile bodies, there issues a vapour, heavy with cloying perfume, sweet as the air the angels breathe, pungent with all the fires of hell. Let him breathe it who dares, and, however strong and great he be, I care not. If the woman wills, then farewell honour, glory, power, ambition, everything—everything but her! Men have died for her; temples, palaces, and gibbets have been built for her; armies have marched for her; fire and sword have swept the lands for her; empires have fallen for her; schools of art, systems of philosophy, and vast domains of intellect have been stepping-stones for her; the earth has trembled—yes, and angels have fallen for her."

Marcia by this time was almost dumb with

dread. She could not understand what this perfervid eloquence in him meant. Woolford's flesh burned as with a fever, but sickly, yellowish lines began to show around his mouth and eyes in deathly contrast with the hue of his flaming cheeks.

"And what an end there is," he went on, "when greatness meets its conqueror! Oh, Antony, Antony! The multitude of fools cry out, mourn, and sigh when a great man falls at a woman's feet. Pooh! They feel the trembling of the sphere, but they do not know the compensation. They do not know that, in finding a being who can conquer his will and fascinate him, he has gained more than he has lost in his fall. They cannot understand that he has made a glorious bargain in his exchange of the hollow mockery of greatness for something tangible, actual, of flesh and blood—the greatest thing in the world—a fascinating woman. Why, to common men, passion is but sordid lust, love an ideal never to be realised. What can they know of emotions by the side of which honour, ambition, rank, and power are meaningless—mere empty words! What is the reward of great achievement at the hands of the mob—the people? Praise, praise, praise! Hysterical acclaim, a great bowing

of heads and stretching of necks! The crowd chokes with the dust of a triumph one day, and spits on the ground the next; and the man of that triumph is fortunate if he come not in the way of the spittle. No man is truly great till he comes to know the mockery, the silly inconsequence of the plaudits of the throng. And then what weight can this adulation of the humanity he spurns have, when placed in the balance against a woman's witchery! The woman who fascinates! She too can praise, can flatter, can—oh, but her eyes are orbs of light, her touch is fire, her hair is yellow flame, her breath is hot from the scorching of hearts, her kiss is the seal of oblivion!"

Woolford had leaped from his chair, and was now pacing the floor with nervous, reeling steps. His face was flushed, his eyes were afire, his gestures wild and sweeping. He stopped suddenly, and bent on Marcia a frenzied, unrecognising look.

"I know a woman," he said, "a woman of that same race—the race of Helen and Cleopatra and the rest. You never saw her—of course you never saw her. She—she is—calling. I must go. Three times I have been there—three times, and failed to find her. Now I'll not fail!"

He was in a delirium. All sense of time, ties, and self had vanished. Marcia took him by the arm and tried to lead him to a chair. He would not be led, but shook her off as if he knew her not. She implored him to be calm. He did not look at her, and paid no heed even when with a despairing cry she fell to the floor, hurled there by his violence. In the library doorway he stopped, clutched the drapery in one hand, passed the other over his brow, and stood for an instant hesitating. Once he turned his contorted face upon Marcia, who was rising from the floor, haggard and wild-eyed. Then he swayed backward and forward, still grasping the drapery in his tightening hand.

"I'm coming," he said, in yielding, tuneful cadence. "Don't look at me so—don't, dear! There is suffering in your eyes. Your neck—your lips are—yes, queen, I come!"

He stepped into the hallway, and the heavy curtain, torn from its fastenings, fell in a heap behind him. Marcia by this time was up and stumbling after him. She flung her arms around his neck, and clung to him; but the strength of her despair was nothing to his strength in rapture. He was going to his queen. Mind and body knew one purpose; nothing else could touch him. He pushed her

rudely from him and did not look at her again, but took his hat and coat from the rack and left the house without another word.

Marcia was transfixed with terror. The minutes passed as she stood there trying to think. She put her hand to her brow bewildered. Where was he going? What could she do to stop him? Who was there to help her? Dr. Hammond could not return in time. Drake? She shrank within herself at the thought of going to him and acknowledging all. Mollie? No, she must not call. She would follow him alone. There was no time to lose. Already her brother's hurried stride was carrying him far down the street.

With a sobbing cry that tore all doubt and hesitation from her heart, and put her fears into God's keeping, she snatched a cloak from the rack, plunged into the night, and followed Henry's leading.

CHAPTER XXI

As I came through the desert thus it was,
As I came through the desert.
—THOMPSON'S *The City of Dreadful Night.*

MARCIA hastened on with a purpose strong enough, but with a plan so vague, so pitiably vague, that she dared not think of what she was about to do. Indeed, she could not think. Her brain was inert, her senses numbed, her heart alone remained on duty. Somehow, without feeling it, she knew the night was raw and cold, the avenue wind-swept and deserted; and she was sure, without really having seen him, that, as she came out upon the sidewalk, her brother had just passed beneath the arc-lamp almost a block away. Precipitately she gathered up her skirts, and ran. That effort, the wind upon her face, the lapse of time, served a little to revive her. She did not halt, did not think of halting. Nothing but bewilderment or mishap could have stopped her now, for the mind had heard the summons of the heart, and was obeying it. Henry's stride was swift, but as long as he should not run, she, running at

intervals, could keep up with him. To follow him was easy at that hour of the night. The storm had driven almost all wayfarers home; and block after block they went, these two, unheeded and unseen. All the length of a long street, northward of home, they travelled thus, Henry striding on, with never a look around him or behind him, his coat unbuttoned and flying unheeded in the wind; Marcia half a block away, her eyes intent upon him lest he turn to right or left and be lost to her, one hand holding the cloak tight around her shoulders, the other looping up the long skirts that, like perverse imps, tugged at her slender ankles; an incongruous, inexplicable, tragic sight, these two—strange pursuer and more strange pursued. But the night has many secrets such as this that the firesides never know!

In a little while Marcia was aware that the streets were no longer familiar to her. They had left the neighbourhood of stately mansions and well-kept walks; and, having turned into a street that veered slightly to the eastward, they were now passing dwelling-houses of more unpretentious aspect, with here and there a darkened shop, and an all-night drug store, and a sombre church that promised nothing of help

or consolation. Soon in their turn these dwellings dwindled to meagre cottages, and the shops increased, and saloons contested with the drug stores for the vantage corners. The sidewalks became rough and treacherous; and what with these, and the appearance of people now and then, some loitering and some hurrying, and the increasing violence of the storm, Marcia found the pursuit growing toilsome and precarious. She drew up a little closer to her brother, and panted from that additional exertion. Fears assailed her—fear of the storm, fear of the midnight city, fear most of all of failing in the end. Once a man who had been lurking in a doorway started to follow her, and she nearly cried aloud for help. Again, a gang of drunken ruffians came suddenly upon her, and with difficulty she checked a frantic impulse to run with all her might and throw herself in her brother's arms. But the fear of him, and the fear that she might thus sacrifice all her chances of saving him, were greater than all her other fears, and nerved her to her duty.

By this time their surroundings had entirely changed. All Marcia's senses reported to her the strange, vulgar, unkempt character of the streets they trod, skirting the business centre of the city: little shops, market-places, stables,

smithies, bar-rooms, negro- and poor-white habitations intermingled, all emitted odours that almost nauseated her; uncurtained windows revealed interiors that frightened her; the wind brought to her straining ears a ragged medley of harsh, wicked, and stunning noises that appalled her. But on and on, down and down, they went, Henry never checking his speed or looking to right or left; Marcia faltering a little, but calling up all her reserves of courage and determination. The wind blew fiercer, the fine snow gathered on Marcia's shoulders, the wetness of the stones penetrated her thin shoes, and she was chilled through and through. A shiver, a sob, a stifled moan; a swaying in the wind, and an aimless catching at a bleak, black wall; and then a brave and final effort, and onward again—onward, for Henry was still in sight.

They crossed street after street which were almost emptied of people; long vistas of swirling blue-white lights, with fringes of incandescent yellow, and the headlight of a cable-car far yonder like a warm, red star of comfort pointing to some the happy homeward way. Finally, one block further down, Henry turned a corner to the left. Marcia hastened after him, fairly stumbled around the corner, and

there stopped short, gasping for breath, nearly fainting from weariness, drooping, wilting, shrinking from sheer horror and shame. For now, all at once, like a fabled leper island lifting out of the uncharted sea, she saw as she sped the French Quarter rising from the shadows of the slums to meet her. That realisation thrilled her, and then chilled her, and at last sent the blood burning through her veins to paint with humiliation the whiteness of her face.

Marcia had learned from the books she had read and her talks with Henry upon the most material themes, that there was a half-world, a place of banished things; and yet the knowledge had not sophisticated her; familiarity with her brother's probings had not tainted her; tales of the slums had not impressed her as aught but tales of a twilight land, peopled with dreadful spectral figures.

After all, how near at any moment are these, the purest and the best, to the vilest and the worst that God has made! Guard the home as you may; set cordons of police around the place of banished things; erect barriers between the virtuous and the vile; and yet, there shall come a day—yes, many a day—when the scarlet and the white shall meet, to blend or to sepa-

rate again—but shall meet for an instant, for an hour, or for all time, as fate shall order them. Daily do skeletons stalk from locked and bolted closets; daily do black sheep plague and disgrace the gentle fold; daily does the past give up its buried sins, and the future unroll its dreaded destinies. There is no heaven but has had its angels fallen, no hell without some loved one there.

Vice lacks the fine fortitude of virtue; it cannot endure adversity; it falters before privation; it whines like a whipped cur beneath the lash of punishment; it droops its painted head and surrenders meekly to the storm. All the gay and lightsome look was gone from the street that night: the buildings confessed their worst dilapidation; the gutters, filled with mud and snow, gave out their most disgusting smells; the wind charged up and down to find out every decaying cornice, and to rattle every patched shutter and every broken door. If the sound of laughter came from within the battered walls, it was but cold and perfunctory; if some wretched hireling hammered on a piano, it was plain the piano was out of tune; if men and women appeared upon the sidewalk, it was only to hurry somewhere, as if by grim want driven. The place that night was the picture,

the symbol, the confession of sordid, ugly, miserable Sin.

Woolford had gone but a little distance from the corner, and had mounted the stone steps of the bravest-looking house that was to be seen. Marcia crept along, with one hand upon the clammy wall of brick, and watched Henry ring the doorbell. She saw a negro open the door and bow her brother in. She tried to shout to the servant, but her voice was only a sorry whisper. The door slammed, and Marcia stood alone, trembling and exhausted, upon the sidewalk, till her temples throbbed as if they were about to burst. Then a purpose seized her—an impulse — an inspiration. She walked bravely to the house, mounted the steps, and rang the bell. As she listened to its clanging and its reverberations, a new terror clutched her. She would have fled away in panic, but the recollection of her brother held her there.

Presently the door was opened by the same servant who had admitted Woolford. Marcia was shaking from head to foot, but mustered up her courage, and without raising her head, said:

"I wish to see——"

The negro, thinking she wanted to see Elise, interrupted her; and in a voice which, like her

own, seemed to come from a long distance, said hurriedly, as he pointed to the stairs:

"Straight ahead—one flight up."

Without a second's faltering Marcia started up the stairs, not knowing whom she would find there. The negro, as she passed him, looked after her doubtfully, and started forward to prevent her; but the bell brought him to his work again, and Marcia was permitted to go on.

Woolford, in the meantime, had gone straight to the gambling-rooms. The long walk through the biting wind had cooled his blood, and for the time at least he was rational and self-possessed.

The girl, without looking to right or left, followed the direction indicated and rapidly walked up the stairs. At the first door, which chanced to have been left ajar, she knocked timidly. No answer came. Waiting a moment, she ventured in. No one was there. Her footfalls made no sound as she walked unsteadily across the floor, looking timorously around the bright room. She caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror—a pale, wild-eyed, lovely creature, with many locks of rich auburn hair astray, and garments all disordered. She started back with a short gasp, not knowing

for an instant that it was herself. Then she moved on again, trying to hasten, and at length passed through other open doors, stepped into the middle of the second room, and stood there staring. Her eyes wandered from wall to wall, slowly comprehending; and finally they rested upon a great mirror. In the mirror there was a reflection of a half-open door, and through the door the vision of a gorgeous, rose-coloured room, and in the room a man and a woman. She could see that the woman there was beautiful, and that her white, bare arms were around the man's neck.

Marcia leaned forward and peered timidly; then peered again. Something fell upon her heart, and crushed it in her bosom till it lay quite still. Her lips parted, and a little whimpering cry passed them. Her brain, already tired out, refused to toil any more. Still she looked. And at last she saw, and knew. The man was not her brother, was not Henry; it was Allan Drake.

She stood there very quiet, a long time it seemed to her. Would they never come and lead her away? Was she to stand there thus for ever? Her parched tongue sought her lips and burnt them. She grew cold, and shivered miserably. She tried to raise her hand, and to

arouse herself from this awful dream. The room was growing smaller; the walls, the floor, the ceiling, were closing in. But she could not save herself, could not take her gaze off the mirror. Then the walls, the mirror, and everything began to dance around her. She grew faint, ill, and sharp pains shot through her head. She staggered, swayed backward, and caught herself; held on a few seconds longer; and then, with a moaning cry, fell to the floor unconscious.

Drake and Elise started up; listened for other sounds, but heard no more; and rushed into the room whence these significant noises came. Elise, looking at the girl prone upon the floor, did not for a minute understand; but Drake, seeing Marcia lying there, with white face upturned, felt a great sickness of horror and dismay. Quickly kneeling at her side, he raised her limp, lifeless form upon his knee, and called her name:

"Marcia! Marcia! What is it, dear? Tell me!"

Elise stood watching him. Instinctively she felt that he was lost to her, saw that she was nothing in the presence of that pale girl lying there, so still and so beautiful, in Drake's arms. As the full realisation of her failure dawned

upon her, there swept over her face a look of anguish, stiffening swiftly into hate. Only a minute did she permit herself to suffer thus in silence. She laughed scornfully; and then, drawing herself up to her full height, she sneered:

"So your sweetheart has followed you! A pretty thing to do!"

Drake did not answer, but lifting Marcia in his arms, rose and started for the door. Elise watched him going—going from her; then all her confessed desire for him returned, redoubled, intensified, and the fiery passion in her blood changed to a steely impulse of revenge. She sprang forward and grabbed him rudely by the shoulder.

"Go!" she hissed. "Go, and take your sweetheart with you! *Bon débarras!* Her brother is the strangler!"

Drake's face blanched and the strength went out of it. He turned and gave Elise one long, searching look, and then, without a word, carried Marcia, still unconscious, down to the street, and they were driven swiftly to her home.

CHAPTER XXII

Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!
—Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol.*

Elise, left alone, remained where she stood like one petrified. Suddenly, her body undulated slightly; her breast heaved; her eyes glistened wildly, and then, in a voice filled with despair, she cried:

"*Tout est fini!*" and flung herself upon the couch, buried her face in her hands, and sobbed.

Presently, she was startled by the sound of footsteps. Before she had time to compose herself, Woolford entered the room, unbidden. She saw at once a look in his eyes different from anything she had ever seen there before; but gave no sign that she noticed it. With daring fearlessness, she took his hand and drew him down among the pillows of the couch, caressingly. He was silent and unresponsive, and looked steadily at her with the peculiar ex-

pression becoming plainer in his eyes. At last, in a voice that she was gratified to know was calm, and with a tilting of her pretty head that was just a reminiscence of her coquetry, she asked:

"You will give me a few minutes?"

Woolford did not answer; but his fixed gaze never for a second left her when she rose and walked to her writing-desk. Taking a sheet of tinted paper, she wrote a few words, hurriedly; then the hand that held the pen halted. Slowly she turned and faced him. His eyes still gloated with maniacal intent; but her gaze met them unflinchingly, and remained thus riveted while her thought, after a brief resting on the man before her, eliminated him and passed on to the man she loved. Should she conceal the truth? Yes, it were better that he should not know. Surely it would add to his happiness. Again she resumed her writing, murmuring the words very softly to the end; then lifting the letter to her lips, kissed it, put it in an envelope, addressed it, carefully sealed it, and imprinted her monogram upon the molten wax. Now she rose, and laid it upon the desk where it could not fail to be seen; and as she did this, her fingers touched a slender paper-knife, shaped like a dagger, with a long steel blade

and a curiously wrought handle of gold. She picked it up and toyed with it; then her lips parted, her breath came quickly, and the shadows and lights came and went across her face like the sunshine and clouds of a windy April day. But when she walked across the room to Woolford, the lights had gone and the shadows were heavy and there was upon her lips only the recollection of a smile. Sadly, sweetly, she put her left arm around his neck. He had not spoken a word since entering the room.

"I know why you have come," she said, at last. "But you couldn't kill me if you wanted to." She spoke with tender plaintiveness, but without a quiver. "To-night, I have no fear," she went on, "because I do not care for you. I never have loved you." Her eyes met his steadfastly; and when Woolford raised his hand, she put her own upon it, and his arm fell to his side.

"I have just written a letter," she concluded, with deliberate emphasis; but when the words passed they took away the rubies from her lips. "It lies there, on my desk. If they should blame you, that letter will clear you."

She paused; their eyes still met in a look that was understanding, challenge, and smouldering fires of memory and love—a look that was also

resignation and farewell. Then, a new spark kindled far down in the depths of Woolford's eyes; and Elise saw it and watched it glow. And when she saw that it was about to burst into flame, she lifted her right hand, which held the tiny dagger, and so quickly that he barely saw the gleam of the steel, she plunged the blade into her breast. Before Woolford realised what had happened, or could catch her, she fell face downward upon the floor. For a few seconds he stared at the prostrate figure, then knelt beside her. Slowly a faint gleam of comprehension seemed to develop in the disordered brain as he leaned over and looked at her. He hardly understood; but presently began to see that she had anticipated his intent; that he had driven her to this, and a vague horror tore at his heart.

Elise's maid heard the sound of the fall and ran into the room. Upon seeing some one bending over the body of her mistress, she thereupon turned, and ran through the house, screaming:

"Elise! The strangler! The strangler!"

Men from the gambling-rooms rushed up the stairs; but were met at the top by Woolford. His face was distorted, and there was such wildness and menace in his eyes that, with one accord, they turned and stumbled in a panic down

the stairs and out into the street. In another minute, he was alone in the house—alone, save for the figure of the girl, prone upon the roses that were now taking a redder stain than they had ever known.

CHAPTER XXIII

For none can tell to what red Hell
His sightless soul may stray.
—Ballad of Reading Gaol.

Once more a whisper went through the Quarter. A tamale peddler bearing a steaming can and singing his unmelodious song, emerged from an alley two blocks away from Therdier's. He was an outcast, subdued by recklessness and want to the lowest purposes of commerce; he sold hot and greasy delicacies, so called, to the inhabitants of the Quarter and their guests, receiving food and lodging for his services; his face was disintegrated and his soul dissolved by drink and by exposure; he was a type of the human dregs of the city. This man, coming out of the alley, stopped, and listened. He heard something that was unusual; and, turning, hurried back through the alley to the dirty factory where his wares were made.

"Something wrong down there," he said to the man in charge; and putting down his can, hastened toward the street in front of Therdier's. He found men standing in every door-

way, listening and looking. From side streets came other persons of various description, but uniformly evil: tramps with disordered clothing and unkempt hair; saloon hangers-on, with blear eyes and cringing gait; ruffians with scarred countenance and wary mien; the ragtag and bobtail of the shanties and the sheds and the box-cars. These joined the groups of pale gamblers, sleek bartenders, and half-intoxicated visitors in the Quarter, as they formed slowly under the arc-lamps, all turning their heads to right and to left, with eyes watchful and oblique, nudging one another, and questioning in tones inexplicably subdued. The tamale-man attached himself to the first group he reached, and added his whisper to the general sibilation. He got no answer to his query, for there was only a shaking of heads, and a puzzled look of dread.

It is not always the finest nature that most subtly feels; for there is in the breaking down of reason, and in the degradation of soul and body, some singular return to nature that revives in man the primary instincts of the brute. All the achievements of the boasted sixth sense of refined and selected nature cannot match the acuteness of animal suggestion that marks the gathering of a mob.

Suddenly, there was a commotion. From the direction of Therdier's came a cry, terrible, maddening, hoarse with anger and fear; and as the groups here and there parted a little, and the men strained their ears and bent their heads to listen, there appeared a man running, waving his arms, and crying out almost incoherently a name that froze the groups to granite. The stumbling, shrieking man, hatless, and with clothing all awry, was old Pete, the gambler.

"The strangler! The strangler!" were the words that tore his lips.

He was seized, held, and madly questioned.

"The strangler!" he shrieked; and put his hands in terror upon his face.

"The strangler! Where?" was the rising cry, when the men had got their senses and their tongues again.

"Therdier's!—Elise!" the trembling wretch exclaimed.

The words were taken up by individuals, by groups, by crowds, by the gathering mob.

"Elise! Elise is dead!"

"The strangler is out again!"

At the first hearing of the hateful word, every man and every group was stopped and stilled, as if with a lightning shock that left them standing stark statues in the night.

"The strangler has killed Elise!"

Numbness of terror yielded to sullen rage, and rage to a hunger for revenge. Men found their voices, their hearts, and such brains as were theirs. The cries of horror were welded into a brazen chorus. Instinctively the groups united, began to move, formed into a solid mass, and, with old Pete in the centre, swayed and surged towards Therdier's. In front of the gambling-house this throng met another, which had assembled around the stricken cluster of pallid gamblers and dumb negro servants, who had been driven pell-mell from the place of death. With aimless gesture and disconnected sentences, they told what had happened. The strangler was there in the house now, and it was death to any one who should dare to enter. The story, gathering details as rapidly as the shivering servitors were encouraged by the crowd to speak, spread from circle to circle of the mob, to be embellished with fresh horror at every leap it made.

The rabble now filled the street from curb to curb. It was a heterogenous mob, yet unified by fear and anger and a purpose of revenge. With the ruffians and the ragamuffins, the gamblers and the barkeepers, there was gradually mingled a contingent of sturdy working men from cer-

tain humble but respectable streets near by; shopkeepers who had heard the tumult and had closed their doors to hurry to the Quarter; well-dressed men who might have found it difficult to explain their so-sudden appearance there; and a full quota of those persons who appear on public occasions of whatever character, and who are The People in comedy, in tragedy, and in every kind of play.

One thing was strange—and yet by no means strange: there was no woman there—not a scrubwoman, not a greasy housewife, not a dancer from a beer-garden, not a painted outcast; not one woman was in that throng. The women were assembled in the far back rooms of the Quarter, where the lights were low, and the doors and shutters bolted, locked, and barred. That name, which had silenced for a few minutes the swarming men out there on the streets, had stunned the women, congealed their blood, and renewed in them all the known fears and all the unknown forebodings that afflict these banished ones, spite of all their veneer of insensibility. They were numb and dumb with terror.

The mob became compact; its courage grew; its understanding of what had taken place bred in its thousand hearts a mad desire to kill. A

mob is a monster, having all the human passions and desires, but no certain brain. It is whim incarnate, force unwieldy, brutality in extreme. It neither reasons nor plans, but only craves, and, with guttural exclamation, waits for any guidance. Till the mind is given it, a mob is just a monster, which may lunge against a building and wreck it, or crush out a few lives in undirected rage, but cannot do its will. Sometimes it is wearied with its own fury, and slinks away in harmless discontent, muttering, and licking its unsatisfied and hanging lips. Sometimes a leader is given it—a man with nerve and brain, who leaps full-armed and loud-voiced into action, like a lithe deity of battle from the head of a ponderous god. Then the mob no longer is a monster merely, but a thing with a purpose, dire, complete, and capable of anything.

This mob, waiting before that house of horror, had found its voice but no brain to guide its fury. The cries and shouts redoubled and multiplied. The tamale-man, swaying near the centre of the crowd, cried, "Kill him! Kill him!" till his tongue was swollen and his voice hoarse. Old Pete, with the image of the dead Elise burning deep into his long-stagnant brain, shrieked with rage. The ragged hoodlums from the railroad yards, revelling in the ruffian

glory of the scene, bellowed like beasts, mad with sight of blood. There was one who yelled continually, "A rope! A rope!" Another's desire was centred upon red flame, and cried for wood and torches. Still another fumed, and swore he would cut out the strangler's heart. But all the cries were evidently to no purpose; and though the rabble yelled till every voice was hoarse, with the indistinctness that gives a peculiar quality of barbarity to human utterance, yet did the man in Therdier's maintain his silence and hold the house. Closer and closer pressed the mob; and now and then a wave of fear swept over the forward lines of men, as if the destroyer was at their throats; and there was a frantic scrambling backward, and the impulse of self-preservation checked the fury for a little while. But steadily, when time passed and the strangler did not appear, the mob grew bolder, and pressed forward till the foremost members of it touched the walls of the grey-stone building. From the two ends of the block, the electric lamps cast a wavering whiteness upon the upturned faces, and showed them pallid and drawn; but the red light from the door and the windows of Therdier's repainted the crimson and the blue of swollen veins and bloated faces. Grimaces and leers and all the distortions of

passion loosed, made of the assemblage a huge exaggeration and a monstrous show, as if a congregation of gargoyles from some mediæval cornice, or the demon shapes of a sad poet's Hades, had been summoned there for purposes untold of men.

And then, when the fury of the mob had reached the climax, and the blood of every man, from workingman to vagabond, was heated till it burnt the flesh, and stretched the nostrils, and reddened the straining eyes—at the supreme moment of the night, there came the leader—the man with the ability to turn all this savage possibility into action. From the very centre of the mob he came, suddenly, inexplicably, it seemed. He pushed through the stinking press, and was aided by eager hands and shoulders in his passage to the front. Not only in his looks, but in his voice and touch, there was command. Every man around him felt it; and the spirit of the leader flashed like a spark of life into and through that inert throng; and long before he had reached the place where he could be fairly seen, every unit in the monster of a mob knew that there was a brain, a presence, and a voice which they could hear, see, follow.

The leader, self-appointed, but speedily accepted at his own estimate of himself, with

amazing celerity won to the front, and mounted the stone steps of the Therdier establishment. Two thousand men looked at him, and not one knew him. He was a man of medium height, with long grey hair and gray mustache of the military fashion. His clothing was ill-fitting and much worn; his face, though red and bloated from hard living, was yet in some way resolute; and his blue eyes were bold and challenging. A soft, black hat shadowed his face when he first climbed the steps, but was soon pushed back so that all could see his features flaming in the mingled lights. In the very fact that he was unknown to all that crowd; in the suddenness of his appearance there; and in his manner of command, were all the elements—mystery, timeliness, and conviction—to make his leadership complete. A murmur greeted him; and then there fell a silence—the first that had visited this wild scene. Not having heard his name the rabble could not shout it; so they waited for him to speak.

"Men!" he said, in a voice that surely had got somewhere the quality of command, "the strangler is in this house. This is his fourth victim! You all know what we should do with men who murder women. Let's get to work! There are machines shops yonder. Bring

sledges and axes. Down there in the railroad yards you will find a steel rail. Get it! We must batter down this door!"

With a yell that shattered the pregnant silence, a crowd of men left the main body and went to obey his orders. From the huge concourse that remained, a savage cheer was raised. The military-looking man took off his hat, wiped his brow, and calmly waited. But the strangler kept his secret in the house; and dead Elise in her room of roses was not more still than he.

In the meantime, the city had become aware that there was trouble in the slums. On Sixteenth Street late loiterers heard the sounds, and listening, moved toward the Quarter. Along every business thoroughfare, there was an accumulating movement in that direction, doubtful and slow at first, but accelerated by the lifting of the tumult. The theatres now discharged their laughing throngs; and above the chatter, merriment, and rustle of silken skirts, rose the surly murmur of the mob. Over these people there fell a curious silence. Women shuddered, and their escorts led them hastily to cars and carriages; while men and boys, alone or in small parties, listening and wondering, swelled the stream of humanity that poured

toward the Quarter. At this time certain cabmen on the corner leaped into their seats, and drove rapidly away. The whisper from the Quarter spread far and far. Out on the Hill, and in distant suburbs, women appeared at doors and windows to question the mumbling voices that came on the fitful wind, now but a multitudinous whisper, now a low muttering, like the sound of water on the rocks, now rising to a roar like the warning of a storm.

In the office of the *Record*, word had just come over the wires of the tumult down in the bottoms.

"A mob in the French Quarter!" announced Armstrong; and upon seeing Drake entering at that moment, hurried on with, "What does it mean?"

Drake's expression changed. He had just come from Marcia, who was slowly recovering under Mollie's loving care. To relieve the poor girl's fears, he had telephoned the French Club to ascertain if Woolford was there. The inquiry, not without some difficulty, brought the answer that he had departed. Marcia, reassured and convinced by this that the delirium must have passed off, had dismissed him without giving or asking any explanations. Drake wisely accepted the situation, and hastened on

to the office. The directness of the question; its close connection with his own thoughts; the accusation of Elise ringing in his ears confused him.

"It may be the strangler!" he exclaimed. It was the merciless conclusion of his mind, and before he was aware of the significance of his utterance.

Was it possible that he could believe this thing? Henry Woolford the strangler? Impossible! Monstrous! Then an awful dread of the possibility of its being the truth assailed him. He started for the hat-rack, when the telephone rang again, and the reporter who had relieved Murphy for an hour, yelled into the instrument a message that was loudly authentic:

"Riot call from Market Street!" he shouted. "Both wagons going!"

"You stay and watch that end of it," Armstrong replied, and then, turning to Drake: "Take all the men here and cover the mob. When anybody else comes in, I'll send him down to you. And, Drake, you'll write the main story, as you know the case. The others will help you as you order them. You can have all the space you will be able to fill."

Drake and the other men hastened out of the office; while Armstrong went to the composing-

room to "kill" all the local copy there was in sight, and to provide space for the big story that was to come.

"If it's the strangler again," said Armstrong to the managing editor, "it is the biggest story of the year. I've put Drake in charge of it, and have given him all the men he can use. He'll spread himself on the story."

Drake and his little squad heard the roar of the mob as soon as they reached the street; and they set off at a run. They were quickly joined by many other men running, for by this time the rumour of a lynching had traversed the city, and men by thousands were gathering in the Quarter. The reporters were still three blocks away from the centre of the disturbance when they began to find progress difficult. There was not much clamour here, but every man was struggling to force his way ahead, asking repeatedly and uselessly what was going on. Trained to this sort of labour, Drake and his fellows made better progress than all the others, and were soon within half a block of Therdier's. Here they stuck fast in the solidifying mass of humanity. In front of them, sounds arose that were filled with promise of things it was their business and their duty to see; and they chafed in helplessness. A patrol

wagon with a dozen policemen in it, came smashing through the crush, and was stopped by the wall of men. Drake watched their futile efforts to break their way through the mob; and he realised that strategy was his only recourse now. He racked his brain for a plan.

"You go back to the office!" he shouted into the ear of one of the reporters. "Tell Armstrong what the situation is. Then write what you have seen here, and come back. We'll get through to the front somehow."

At that instant there was a movement of the crowd in the direction of a side street, and presently there came running from that place a gang of rough men, bearing on their shoulders a steel rail they had picked up in the railroad yards. With yells and curses, they dashed into the crowd, and it parted for them. Drake was quick to see the opportunity.

"Get next to that rail!" he cried to the three men who were still with him. "Help carry it! And don't quit till you get to the front! I'm going around to the rear of the house."

With much difficulty he retraced his steps, reached the corner of the sidewalk at the intersection of the streets, pressed himself closely against the walls of the buildings on the cross street, and after a long struggle, forced his

way into the alley at the very spot where he and Elise had one night entered the building where the hirelings of the "Compagnie" had met Jacques Therdier. The thought had come to him that he could find the way they had taken that evening on their return to her room. The hesitancy he had then felt was not present in him now; for a greater dread overwhelmed it. He had not taken time to speculate on what had happened. No one had told him that the murder had been done, or the strangler found, in Therdier's. In all the cries of the mob no name he knew had struck his ears. From the point he had reached in the packed thoroughfare, he had not been able, visually, to determine what was the objective place of the furious mob. Indeed, so changed had been the character of the gathering by the coming of men from all parts of the city, that none except those thousand or two in the densest part knew the true meaning of all that violence. The one cry that rose out of the tumult was, "The strangler!"—a cry terrible enough to justify everything. It was enough for Drake. He did not care to learn more then. Elise's outburst had prepared him for anything; and there was in his brain a dull understanding of it all, and in his heart a dread he dared not analyse.

To get into the house of Therdier was the present business; and he knew in his soul that he would be too late. Yet he must be there, quickly.

The alley, though men hurried through it in both directions, was not crowded like the street. But it was dark, and Drake had no gentle hand to guide him now; and he found the going difficult. Tripping over rubbish, splashing through pools of mud and water, stumbling against jagged fences and swinging gates, he came at last to a door which he thought was the rear entrance to Therdier's. He turned the knob, and stepped into a dimly-lighted kitchen. But it was not the Therdier kitchen; for upon his appearance without warning there, three women who had been huddling around a stove, leaped to their feet with shrieks of fear, and cowered against the wall. Drake stayed long enough to reassure them, and then hurried away. Creeping cautiously along, he came, after what seemed to him hours of toil, to the place near the end of the alley where he knew the door of Therdier's house must be. This part of the alley was now almost free from people; but the street before him, like that which he had left, was a mass of raging humanity. So absorbed were these men in their mad desire to reach

the street where the centre of the mob was, that they paid no attention to the alley; and Drake was able to reach the shadowed door unnoticed. He stumbled up the low wooden step, and fumbled around the door till his hand fell upon the knob. The door was locked. He shook it violently, but though it appeared to be not very solid, still it would not yield. Baffled and dismayed, Drake stood for a few seconds, trying to think. Then he stepped into the alley again, and surveyed the rear of the building. A dim light came through the windows. The silence of the house was deadly and chill, in contrast with the roaring of the mob. As Drake scanned the wall and the windows, he heard the noise in the street suddenly increase in volume, and then as suddenly die away into a silence that was more terrible than the turmoil. Maddened almost by anxiety, and made desperate by this new phase of the savage horde's career, Drake rushed to the single window that was within his reach, and tried to open it. He could not move it. Raging under such defeat, he stepped back to the middle of the alley, measured the distance between him and the door, and ran and hurled himself against it with all his might. The fastenings of the lock gave way, but still held sufficiently to bar his

entrance effectually. Once more he retreated, and again hurled himself against the door. This time it yielded, flew open with a crash, and banged against the wall of the kitchen. Drake fell headlong upon the floor, and lay there a few seconds, stunned. When he arose, he could hardly stand because of the pain in his shoulder; but he gathered himself together, and stumbled up the stairs leading to the second floor.

In the meantime, the three reporters whose duty it was to follow the steel rail, did their work well and arrived at the front of the clamouring multitude with the men who had brought it from the railroad yards. The grey-haired leader called to them to hurry. One end of the rail was pushed up to him. He reached for it, and hundreds of hands clawed the air in eagerness to have a part in breaking down the door. The shouting now was deafening; the rage of the mob was at white heat; and it seemed that the hundreds of frantic men would with one impulse hurl themselves upon the house, and with their naked hands tear it to pieces.

At that instant the red-curtained door was flung wide open; the light from the interior was shed brilliantly upon the faces of the wild and hungry pack; and Henry Woolford stepped quietly and with dignity out upon the steps.

CHAPTER XXIV

He is up
There like a Roman statue! He will stand
Till death hath made him marble!

—CHAPMAN.

FOR almost a minute Woolford looked curiously upon the scene before him. One hand was thrust into the pocket of his coat, and the other hung listlessly at his side. He was serene. His countenance showed no trace of the awful delirium through which he had passed. His clear eyes swept over the mob; and thereupon the shouting ceased; a hush came upon the rabble, and every man near enough to see, stood still. The man they had cursed and sought for hours to slaughter was there before them, alone and helpless, and yet there was something so compelling in that tall, grand figure that they were inspired with awe; and even the determined leader on the steps was moved to dumb submission.

When the silence was complete, save for the hurried breathing of a thousand men, and indistinguishable sounds from the outskirts of the crowd, Woolford raised his arm commandingly.

The straining eyes of all that rabble were upon him; bearded lips were parted in amazement; bloated faces were relaxed; and vengeful arms became inert and purposeless. Woolford held his arm aloft till he had fixed the attention of every man within his sight. Then he began to speak, in tones that crashed and rang like the shock of steel on steel.

"What do you mean by this exhibition?" he cried.

He paused, as if waiting for a reply. A blear-eyed ruffian near the steps found his voice, and cried out, "We want the strangler!"

Woolford looked down upon him, and the fellow quailed, and shrank back behind another.

"Are you mad?" the lawyer continued. "Is your lust for blood so hot that you cannot think? Are you cowards that in your frenzy you would murder an innocent man?"

His words, though slow and calm, hurt like the flat of a sword upon their backs. The white-haired leader started angrily toward Woolford, and lifted his arm, and began to shout a curse. Woolford did not stir, but bent upon the man a look so threatening and black that the curse died in the man's throat, and he slunk away again, and hung his head. Raising his right arm deliberately, and pointing a finger

at him, Woolford, in a voice that carried to the utmost limit of the throng, and was so charged with accusation and contempt that the men nearest him recoiled, cried out:

"Do you people know this coward who is leading you? Ten years ago this very month he murdered, in cold blood, his poor, sick wife. He came to me, and lied to me, and I defended him. I saved him from the gallows—this brute; and when it was too late to punish him, I discovered that a mad dog is more worthy of mercy than he is. You, yes, you—you murderer!"

"It's a lie! It's a lie!" shrieked the old man, while his face first paled, and then blazed with fury, and his body shrivelled up with fear. "It's a lie! Damn you! I never saw you before!"

But he did not move, and could not keep his gaze off Woolford. Stirred by the lawyer's words, the men whose minds had been quite made up a little while before, were now confused, and looked from Woolford to the man, and back to Woolford, muttering angrily the while.

Having thus disposed of the leader of the rabble, Woolford now turned his attention to the worthy citizens that composed it. His voice now changed. There was just a touch of pathos in it, but no note of pleading, and not a

hint of fear. It was borne like a simple melody over the congregation of distorted faces.

"I am Henry Woolford, the lawyer," he said. "Whom do you seek?"

"We want the strangler!" shouted a man far back in the crowd.

The cry was repeated here and there. On the edge of the assemblage, near the stone wall of the house, another man raised his arm, and cried:

"You are the man!" It was Pete, the gambler.

"Seize him! Kill him! Hang him!"

The ferocity of the mob, checked for the moment, was now rising again. The mutterings and shouts increased, there was a surging movement, and the heavy faces showed the storm was up again. But Woolford's expression did not change. The men nearest him were stilled; and more slowly than before, the noise subsided until there was only a fragmentary clamour far out on the uncertain edges of the throng. When he spoke again his voice was low and mellow, and was weighted with such sadness and pity that even those sordid and degraded men were touched and a little shamed. Never since he began to speak was the silence so intense as now.

"In this house, in a gorgeous room all roses, amid her silks, her gold and her jewels, lies the body of a poor girl. She sleeps in a pool of blood. An hour ago, she was fair beyond the dreams of other women; now, her beautiful body stiffens and grows cold. Death has stolen away the roses from her cheeks, the diamonds from her eyes, and the rubies from her lips. In a little while you shall see her, cold—still—dead. You shall——"

"Her murderer! Where is he?" one man cried; and the rabblement took up the query.

"Where is he? Let us have him!"

"The man you want is beyond your reach and beyond your power. When you go up there, you will find him lying dead across her body."

Henry's voice was now thin and sweet as the plaintive creeping of the fifes when fresh flowers are put upon the graves. A shiver ran through the mob, and some men moved uneasily.

"Prove what you say!" shouted one fellow with bloodshot eyes, and a face on which no vestige of human comeliness remained. He had a huge club in his right hand, and he brandished it as violently as the density of the crowd around him would permit. Woolford cast one glance at him.

"Patience, fellow! The dead will not escape

you. What has this poor girl—what has this man done that in the peacefulness of death, a howling, cursing, violating horde of worse than beasts should desecrate that chamber, and cry for blood that is already growing cold! It were better that you make a funeral pyre of this cursed house, and make a winding-sheet of flame for these two unhappy ones. Fire is good when the brain is tired, and when the body chills. And the fire that warms their poor, cold limbs will cool your bestial fury."

"Into the house! Into the house!" was now the cry.

"Let us see for ourselves!" rose the morbid clamour, far and near.

There was a mighty forward movement that appeared this time to be final and irresistible; but Woolford, still in command, with a gesture silenced them. His lips curled. A rage greater than the crowd's had ever been, glowed, leapt, and spread in his eyes.

"Curs!" he cried, in tones that scorched. "You don't dare to touch me! Dare to lay a hand on me, and I tell you that within an hour, this very mob will take that man, and, like a pack of jackals, will tear him, rend him, and howl to see his blood sprinkle their clothing. Back, you cowards! Back, I say!"

Astounded, cowed, and expectant, the mob halted, and stared at that fiery figure on the steps. He was alone there now, for the whilom leader had long since slipped down and hid himself. Woolford's face was pale, but still serene, save for the anger in his eyes and the curling of his lips. His head was thrown back, and his form erect and proud.

"I haven't finished with you yet, you vermin!" he sneered. "You are quite used to being walked upon. Men, a thousand times less than I, use you every day of your lives for their own purposes. Oh, I know you! It's only when you meet in a mob like this that you suddenly grow so brave; and find in your burnt-out souls a little spark of courage—a spark that I can blow out with a breath. If I wanted to walk out through this crowd unharmed, do you think I could not do it? Bah! You would open a passage for me—would cringe away from me—and would shout my name as any rabble does when it is permitted to see a real man pass by. Do you think Henry Woolford would accept his life from such as you?"

This was too much to be borne even by that insensate herd; and the besotted souls, though still afraid, were stirred to rage by these insults heaped upon them with such daring.

"Lynch him! Lynch him!" they yelled.

"A rope! Get a rope!" they fairly screamed in their frenzy.

As they pushed and struggled there was an ominous sound like that of hungry swine chewing on the husks. Woolford again attempted to speak, but this time his effort was in vain. The tumult grew. Yells, curses, and bellowings of incoherent passion mingled and were transformed into a roar like that of some great furnace under draught. Men in their anger fought and struggled with one another. Even in the heat of their one intent, there was a mad discordance. The men in the centre and in the rear of the throng pushed upon those in front, who, under the stern and challenging eyes of Woolford, were stricken with sudden panic, and strove to retreat. The result was that the opposing waves of fury and of fear mingled, met, and clashed. Men were trampled under foot. Screams of pain and fright were added to the general tumult. Woolford, calm and contemptuous, stood and watched the swaying, cursing, disordered mass of humanity; and beneath the scorn and the condemnation that were depicted upon his countenance, there appeared a little touch of pity. It lingered there a moment, like a thought of mercy in the heat of

battle. Then, from somewhere across the street, a report sounded faintly above the roar, and a bullet went crashing through the door. Woolford felt it fan his cheek; and a smile—cynical, cold, and merciless—came upon his lips. A minute longer he looked upon the scene; then turned, and walked into the house.

While the mob still tore itself, Woolford went straight to Elise's room. He paused at the door, and looked around slowly—looked at the splendid hangings, at the lights shining through the silken ceiling, and at the rosewood dressing-table. He walked over to the table, and glanced over the array of trinkets. In the midst of them stood a waxen candle in its stick of gold. He picked this up, held it in his hand a minute, and then threw it into a heap of silken draperies, where they fell thickest from the wall upon the floor. For a few seconds he fixed his eyes upon it where it lay feebly flaring. Then he turned, and walked over to the body of Elise, where she lay upon the floor, in her gown of white. One tiny foot protruded from beneath the silken robe. A bit of her gleaming neck was visible; but there were flecks of red upon it, and a great stain was upon the white, flimsy garment. He knelt beside the body, raised it in his arms, and pressed his lips once, twice, three

times, upon the frozen forehead. Then he gently laid the stiffening form back upon the roses of the carpet; and without rising to his feet, drew a revolver from his pocket, placed it carefully to his breast, and with steady pressure pulled the trigger. The ball went true; and Henry fell forward upon the body of the girl.

At the instant that the mob found courage to enter the front door, Drake burst into the kitchen in the rear. He was the first to enter the room of roses. With a pang in his heart, he knelt, and raised Woolford in his arms, and found that he was still breathing.

"Henry!" he called to him, softly, beseechingly.

Woolford's eyes opened, and a faint smile of recognition came and dwelt upon his face.

"Allan!" he whispered, almost inaudibly.

"Yes, yes!" answered Drake, in a broken voice, putting his ear close to the lips that were already blue and almost too cold to shape the words. But with a final effort, just as the eyelids drooped wearily, and closed, never to open again, the dying man murmured:

"Tell—Marcia—it—is—better—so. I leave her—to—you."

He was dead.

The mob, a few seconds later, rushed into the

room. Drake stood over the bodies of Woolford and Elise; and told them who he was, and what had happened. The man who had taunted them and held them at bay, was dead. They could not harm him further. Awed, they turned, stared at the gorgeous surroundings, and then slowly quit the room. The word was passed along, down the stairway, out into the street, and through all the cooling crowd that the lawyer had spoken the truth.

Drake, watching until the last ragged ruffian stole out of Elise's apartments, dully recalling all that had happened there, slowly realised the tragedy. His wandering eyes suddenly lit upon the letter Elise had left lying on her desk. He picked it up, saw that it was addressed to himself and was about to open it, when his gaze was drawn by something that chilled him and held him spellbound for minutes where he stood. On the great mirrored dressing-table was a tall, slim vase, and in it a bunch of deep red, and very large carnations. Unconsciously he found himself counting, "one," "two," "three——" There were thirteen of them. As he looked at this appalling thing, he became aware of another object that dragged his reluctant gaze away from the carnations, and held it even more irresistibly. It was beyond them in a

corner of the room, and of even a brighter hue than the brilliant flowers. It had long, upright leaves that lengthened and shortened, bent and curled, twisted and writhed and grew. Looking fixedly upon it, he saw strange blossoms bloom among the leaves, like magic flowers in a Hindoo miracle. They blossomed roundly, beautifully, and spread and burst into a radiance. Then suddenly the leaves were eaten up by the flowers, and the flowers themselves became a great leaping flame; and wreaths of blue, purple, and orange vapour curved toward the ceiling.

Drake, uttering a cry of alarm, thrust the letter into his pocket, and rushed into the hallway.

"Fire!" he shouted, frantically; heard the cry taken up in the hall below and outside the house; and stumbled back into the room of roses, of blood, and of fire.

CHAPTER XXV

They burnt a corpse upon the sand—
The light shone out afar;
It guided home the plunging boats
That beat from Zanzibar.
Spirit of Fire, where'er Thy altars rise
Thou art Light of Guidance to our eyes!
—Rudyard Kipling.

In the few seconds of Drake's absence from the room of roses the fire had made amazing headway. When he returned it was with the purpose to drag the bodies out of the burning room, through the two other rooms, and into the hallway, where he hoped by that time to have assistance. He was confronted by a sight that held him in the doorway helpless and gasping for breath. The rose hues were now beaten and discredited by the sweeping brushes of the fire, furiously painting. Three sides of the room were blazing. Long silken draperies turned from rose to flame, and dropped in ashes on the floor. Nervous tongues shot out, licked the roses off the ceiling, laid bare the walls, and fed upon the pictures on the dressing-table. The smoke that lifted in blue wreaths toward the

ceiling was not heavy smoke, but had a faintly aromatic odour, which sickened Drake before it began to smother him. He stood but an instant in the doorway, and then rushed forward toward the bodies upon the floor. He grasped the collar of Woolford's coat and began to pull the body toward the door. But even as he toiled, the flames reached the divan, and a long, slim serpent of fire squirmed and wriggled with incredible swiftness along the edge of the orange robe and came to Elise's foot, licking at her slipper with its many-forked tongue, and swallowed it with a horrid little lapping sound of greed. In another instant it was in her lace and silken skirts, writhing and hissing intolerably. He watched it till a broad streamer of smoke floated from somewhere across his face, and hid the body from sight. When he looked again, her clothing was on fire from waist to hem, and the long, slim serpent was at her throat. Drake uttered a cry of horror, which was quickly changed to one of dismay and pain; for the flames now leaped upon him, and he felt his clothing catching afire. He stepped back, and with one final vision of the red serpent coiling itself among the black rings of Elise's hair, and gasping for breath, half-blinded, he staggered from the

room and fell down the stairs. Upon reaching the street, he hastened to the nearest drug store to telephone a message to Marcia, who, through all the excitement and horror of the night, had been present in his thoughts. When kneeling with Woolford in his arms and hearing his last words, Drake's first impulse had been to go to her; but that was then impossible, for the mob was already in the house. Later, when he had sent the ruffians away, and again when he had gone out into the hallway to give the alarm of fire, it was his intention to force his way from the house and hasten to the Woolford home; but immediate duty held him. Having failed in his effort to save the bodies from the fire, he was now free to go to Marcia. How could he tell her what had happened? He would postpone it for a little while. Then an expedient occurred to him. He got the night chief operator, and secured a ready promise that the Woolford telephone be disconnected for the remainder of the night; he called up the night captain of police and caused two detectives to be sent to watch the Woolford home lest some one might carry to her the news of her brother's death. And finally he wrote the poor girl a short note telling her that Henry was with him; that he was quite calm, but that he would take

him to Dr. Hammond's and leave him there. Having accomplished all these things, Drake walked rapidly to the *Record* office, his dominating thought then being that he must write the story of Henry Woolford's death.

When he reached the local room the other men were writing furiously, but all stared at him as he entered. His coat had been burnt through in several places, and one sleeve was gone. His hair was singed short on one side of his head, his face was flushed and raw as the result of its close contact with the flames, and from under his singed eyebrows his eyes shone feverishly and without meaning. He did not speak, but went to his desk, arranged his writing-paper, and grasped a pencil clumsily in his bandaged hand.

"Henry Woolford is dead. He died——"

He stopped, looked vacantly at the sentence, and tore up the sheet of paper on which it was written. He began once more, and destroyed the next sheet as he had the first. Again and again he tried in vain. The city editor came and stood by his desk.

"Write as much as you can, Drake," he said. "Yours will, of course, be the main story—three or four columns, I should say. The others are writing features in detail."

He looked sympathetically at Drake, but said no more. It was not a time for personal solicitude. Drake stared a little longer at the sheet of blank paper. Somehow he could not write—could not frame a sentence. In his brain there was only a mad jumble of visions: Elise, Woolford, the fire, Marcia. Mechanically he drew his notebook from his pocket, and from between the leaves dropped a letter. Slowly he opened it and read:

Mon bien aimé:—

Elise lied to you to-night. You will not think unkindly of her, will you, Allan? Woolford is here. Do not let them blame him. I am going to end it all in a few moments. *Le Bon Dieu* will be merciful—will pity me.

Je t'aime—Je t'adore—Adieu,

ELISE.

Into the reddened eyes of Drake tears came unwillingly. Poor girl! he said to himself, remembering how she had looked in the pride of her beauty—the laughing, tantalising creature. And she had loved him! He put the thought aside to hasten with his writing, that he might soon go to Marcia. How could he ever tell her! And how could he write that story! The lawyer was her brother, and his friend. To parade their tragedy before the curious eyes that would on the morrow devour

the pages of the paper! It was bad enough that somebody must feed the morbid hankerings of the public with grief so private and so humiliating as this; but that he—Drake, the friend—the trusted friend, should do that—should sit there and with vivid words describe the fall of Henry Woolford, and the pitiable distress of the girl, the sister whom he loved—that was too much. He dropped his pencil; then slowly picked it up again. The paper! He had never dreamed that he could ever be recreant, be disloyal, be found wanting there. Must he now write that story, though it be with his own heart's blood?

"A mob, fired by the rumour that the strangler——"

Again he stopped and looked around the room. The other men were writing rapidly, and in silence. Armstrong, chewing the stub of a cigar, read page after page of copy, and sent it to the composing-room. Upstairs the linotypes rattled and jarred as the story of the tragedy and of the mob went into type. The night editor came in, looked anxiously at the clock, and had a whispered conference with Armstrong. It was now 2.15 o'clock.

Suddenly Drake ceased to stare about him, bent forward, and wrote these words:

I can't do it, Mr. Armstrong. This is my resignation.
ALLAN DRAKE.

Then he arose from his chair. His face, still red from the effect of heat, was blotched with pallor, and there was a look of anguish in his eyes. He staggered out of the room, almost unnoticed by the busy men around him. Murphy saw him go, and stood up as if to follow him; but hesitated, and finally sank back into his seat. A reporter came in to say that the fire was under control, but that the interior of the building had been destroyed, and the bodies of Elise and Woolford reduced to ashes amid the ruins.

Presently Armstrong noticed that Drake was not in the room. He walked over to the vacated desk, looked for the heaped-up manuscript that should have been there, and found only the pencilled resignation. He became red with anger, but did not speak till the flush had left his face, and his voice was calm.

"Murphy," he said, "Drake is ill. You'll have to write an introduction. Make it a column, if you can. It puts us in a bad hole, but——"

CHAPTER XXVI

And I think in the lives of most women and men,
 There are moments when all would go smooth and even,
If only the dead could find out when
 To come back, and be forgiven.
—Owen Meredith.

It was October again. From the broad verandah of Dr. Hammond's ranch-house, perched high up in the foothills of the Rockies, Marcia was watching the trees with their leaves dipped in the sunset's overflow, and flaunting their colours like little children vain of their finery; and ever and anon glancing upward at the towering peaks with their tops covered with snow. The kind old doctor had offered the place to them, and Drake gladly accepted that which was practically a command from the physician to enable Marcia to rest and regain her health. Absorbed in the wonderful view and her thoughts, she did not hear the footsteps behind her, and it was not until two arms were put around her neck that the girl cried:

"Why, Allan! What made you so late? I expected you on the early train."

"Dearest, I missed it—met Murphy—and——"

"Always that Murphy," answered Marcia, with a happy laugh.

"You had better not run down Murphy—for he's your friend," retorted Drake.

"Indeed! And how so?"

"Told me this morning that he never could make out why you consented to marry me."

"Perhaps I had to have some one to take care of me," she replied, coyly.

Drake smiled.

"As to that, it looks now as if I had married quite an heiress. I saw Doctor Hammond yesterday. He expects the court to discharge him as the executor of the estate this week. He has done very well, considering how tangled things were. You will own the house, a half-interest in a good mining property and quite an amount in gilt-edged securities, not counting——"

"My chief possession," Marcia broke in, quickly.

Drake looked puzzled.

"'A loaf of bread—and thou,'" she whispered.

They were silent a long time, their hands tight in each other's grasp. Presently, as night began to fall, he drew her into the "living-

room," where a sudden flaring of the flames in the huge fireplace threw a gleam across her face, heightening the colour there, burnishing the rusty places the shadows had made in her hair.

As Drake regarded her thus, his thoughts reverted to those terrible, ever-present days of her sorrow. How she must have suffered! How she trusted and believed in him!

"I love you, Marcia, dear," he said, simply.

"And you have quite forgotten that beautiful girl?"

"Yes."

"And was she in love with you?"

"No. No, dear, no! If you knew all about the poor girl you would understand—feel very sorry for her sad end."

Marcia dropped her hand from his and pushed back some loosened locks of hair. There was something in her attitude so sweet and wistful that it keenly touched him.

"Shall I tell you about her, Marcia?"

The young wife did not answer at once; but for a while kept her eyes downcast, and her fingers twitched nervously. Then, with swift, final decision, she lifted her face up to him, and there was a look upon it that he would treasure even to the last moment of his life.

"No."

"And you believe me?"

"I love you!"

Drake reached forward quickly and caught her to him. Gently, almost reverently, he kissed her, and there was much peace.

"If Henry were only here," said Marcia, with intense emotion.

Drake did not answer, but fondled and soothed her until, in a voice that trembled, she murmured:

"That awful night, when Henry—first told me of his trouble, he said that we must, hand in hand, go down through the fury of the storm and, hand in hand, up to the sunlight on the other side. Allan, dearest, this must be the other side."

THE END

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